

The Happiness I Seek

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Summary: A time traveling demon brings Buffy face to face with a Slayer of the past...who can perhaps teach her something about life.

1. The Happiness I Seek

Disclaimer: Obviously, I'm not Joss Whedon (for one thing, I'm a girl), so I didn't create all of these characters. I just borrowed them, but I'll clean 'em and return 'em when I'm done. But I did create Annaliese, James and Zeitlos. No one's paying me to do this either; I just have too much free time. Almost forgot...I also don't own the lyrics to "Cheek to Cheek". According to my English Patient soundtrack, the song belongs to Irving Berlin, as sung by Frank Sinatra or Ella Fitzgerald. If you haven't heard this song, find a way to; it's one of my all-time favorites.

Author's notes: This story most likely takes place somewhere between "Halloween" and "Lie to Me"...approximately the beginning of Season Two. Oh, have you ever wondered where Buffy got that pretty snowflake necklace she wore in "Amends".....? Also, I have taken liberties with Buffy's 17th birthday and set it in late January.

Dedication: This one goes out to my grandmother who might not know anything about the show ("what's that television program you like, Kristen?....Muffy the Vampire Killer?"), but provided the inspiration for this story as well as so many other things I've tried in my life. I love you Gran'ma.

The Happiness I Seek by Kristen Elizabeth

"Giles, something's going to happen tonight."

The Watcher looked up from his reading and focused his attention on the Slayer, one Buffy Summers. "How can you tell?", he asked in his soft British accent.

Buffy's brow crinkled in thought. "I don't know. I can just tell. It's a feeling."

"That's good!", Giles encouraged. "A Slayer must develop an innate sense of forthcoming danger if she intends to stay alive....um...succeed, I mean."

"And with that oh-so-happy thought, the tireless crusaders return from their mission of mercy", Xander Harris announced his presense.

"Did you get any jellies?", Giles inquired.

"Yep. They're in there", Willow Rosenberg pointed to the box Xander carried with her jelly-sticky finger. "A couple of them didn't survive the trip."

Soon fortified with a jelly doughnut, Giles returned his attention to Buffy. "Now, describe this feeling. When did it begin?"

Buffy sat down on the steps leading to the second level of Sunnydale High's library. "This morning. I feel this tightness in my chest, but it's not painful. It's just...heavy. Something big is happening tonight....I just don't know what."

"Is that why you called this way-too-early-for-a Saturday-morning research session?", Xander asked, polishing off his third cruler.

"Giles is responsible for that, Xander", Buffy replied, leaning back against the banister.

"Yes...guilty as charged. We've been neglecting your studies, Buffy. Especially the history of Slaying." Giles cleaned his glasses with his sweater-vest.

"So, why are we here?" Xander licked glaze off his index finger.

Willow looked up from the computer she had situtated herself at. "Where else would we be?" Her oldest friend had to agree with the truth in her simple statement. Ever since they had met Buffy, almost a year ago, the Slayer's secret life had become theirs as well.

"Shall we continue the studying then? We were just about done with the forties, if memory serves." Giles looked at his Slayer for confirmation.

She nodded, distractedly. Her Watcher picked up the book he had been reading. "Now then.....ah, yes. Annaliese Janson. She was a Slayer from her calling in 1943 until her death in 1948."

"How old was she?", Willow asked, her interest peaked.

"Um...she was eighteen when she died", Giles read.

"Died from what?" Xander sat down at the big table.

Buffy glanced over at her friend. "What do most Slayers die from,

Xander?"

"Not to be a party-pooper, but isn't this slightly morbid? Learning about how previous Slayers died?" Willow bit her lip.

"I agree Will, but supposedly it's good to know where other Slayers failed. In theory, I can avoid their mistakes." Buffy stood up and stretched. "So, let me guess. Annaliese fought the wrong vamp and got herself drained?"

"Actually, it was a demon. To make a long story short, he was planning to destroy the world....", Giles began, before Xander cut him off.

"And after fifty years, the demons still haven't changed their goals." He shook his dark head in mock disappointment.

Giles glared at the boy before going on. "Annaliese managed to stop him, but she died in the process."

"Then the next Slayer was called and fun continued, and still continues", Buffy stifled a yawn. "The story never changes."

"I would think you'd have a little more gratitude, Buffy. The Slayers who came before you had it much worse than you do", Giles reprimanded. "You forget that women were considered the weaker sex until about twenty years ago."

"Well then, that should have made the element of surprise no trouble at all." Buffy bit into an éclair.

"Buffy, you have the luxury of not having to hide your strength and skills on a daily basis. The Slayers before you, like Annaliese, had to pretend to be far weaker and simpler than they were, if they hoped to be accepted by society at all. Most didn't even try. They lived completely isolated from the rest of the world. The ones who tried to maintain their normal lives after their calling, had to be extremely careful about hiding their secret. No one except their Watchers and the Council had any idea who they were. There were no 'Slayerettes' for these girls. They were on their own against some incredibly powerful demons. Imagine what that must have been like." There was a long pause after Giles finished his speech.

"They must have been so lonely", Willow broke the silence.

"Lonely doesn't even begin to describe it", Giles told her. "But, it was their sacred duty and they gave up their lives for it."

Buffy looked extremely uncomfortable. "I do respect that. But can you understand how it doesn't exactly make me a happy Slayer to know who had to die to make me what I am today?"

"Yes, I see that", Giles admitted. "Still, it's a necessary part of your training."

"Did Annaliese destroy the demon that she was fighting, Giles?", Willow asked, curious to learn more about this Slayer.

"I don't know", Giles answered. He flipped through the book he was holding. "Her Watcher's diary is extremely sketchy. He was

grief-stricken. From what I can gather, they were in love."

Buffy looked up suddenly. "Her and her Watcher? In love?"

"Yes. I know it's a rather unsettling thought, but it has happened before."

Xander choked back a laugh at the matching looks of vague disgust on Buffy and Giles' faces. "I don't know. I think it's kind of romantic", Willow said, turning her attention from the computer. "What happened to her Watcher?"

"He died a few years ago. I met him once, at a reception for the Council. Extremely sharp for his age, but very sad, too", Giles mused. "I don't think he ever got over Annaliese's death."

"Can I see the diary?", Willow asked, holding out her hand to take it from Giles.

Buffy finished her eclair and wiped her hands on a paper napkin. She still couldn't shake the forboding feeling. And all of this talk about a dead Slayer was not improving her state of mind.

Willow flipped a few pages and then stopped, suddenly. "Look", she breathed. "It's her." Everyone was quiet as Willow gently lifted a small black and white picture from the inside of the diary. It was of a very young, very pretty woman. She was looking off to the right, a smile on her face. Written on the back were the words "Annaliese January 10, 1948".

"That's a beautiful necklace", Buffy commented, leaning in to see the picture better.

"It must have been taken right before she died", Willow guessed. "According to the diary, she died on January 15."

Buffy paled, all thoughts of the girl's jewelry gone. "You guys, today is January 15, 1998"

There was a momentary silence. "Fifty years ago", Xander finally said what everyone was thinking. "She died exactly fifty years ago. You know, this could explain your creepy feeling, Buffy."

A chill passed through Buffy as she took the picture from her friend's hand to better see this long-dead Slayer. "She looks so happy", Buffy whispered. "She looks like she's in love. Did she have any idea how little time she had left?"

"It's best not to think about that, Buffy", Giles said, gently taking the picture and replacing it in the diary.

The Slayer shook her head, as if to snap herself out of a momentary trance. "I know. Concentrate on the things you can change, not the things that are unchangable."

"You just made that up, didn't you?", Xander smiled.

Buffy returned the smile, almost unthinkingly. "Look, I still think something is going to happen tonight. I'm going to hit the streets. Maybe I'll hear something. See you later, okay?" Without waiting for

replies, Buffy grabbed her coat and headed out of the library.

Buffy walked aimlessly for about an hour before she realized that she had circled the block his apartment was located on five times. She knew he was probably asleep, the sun rising towards its highest, but somehow, she needed to see him, needed to hold him. Silently, she entered the building and crept towards his door.

"Angel", she whispered, knocking softly. Getting no reply, she tried the doorknob. It was unlocked. Buffy gently pushed on the door with one index finger. It creaked open. "Oops. It just opened all on its own."

The Slayer quietly crept into her boyfriend's apartment. "Angel", she called out a little louder, hoping to avoid startling him. When she again got no response, she knew he had to be sleeping. Walking into his bedroom confirmed this. Buffy smiled as she looked at him. He looked so young and peaceful. Only an occasional wrinkle in his brow betrayed the fact that appearances were deceiving. Angel may have looked like a harmless young man, but Buffy knew all too well that he had not been so since the 1700's. And although his sleep appeared to be deep, he suffered from some of the worst nightmares imaginable. After all, he lived with the knowledge of his two hundred years of vampiric killing.

But these weren't thoughts Buffy had every day. She wasn't sure she could love Angel like she did if she thought of him as a murderer every time she looked at him. She loved Angel, the handsome, mysterious, and good man he had been ever since a gypsy curse had restored his soul. Gently, she sat on the edge of the bed and placed her hand on his cheek. His skin was cool to the touch.

He awoke suddenly at the slight pressure. "Buffy?", he asked, still half-asleep.

"Good morning", she whispered. "I didn't mean to wake you." Angel sat up to see her better. "Is something wrong?"

"No. I just wanted to see you", she replied, honestly. As if to prove this, she kissed him.

He smiled a second later when she pulled back. "Good morning to you too."

"Late night last night?", she asked.

"Always. I waited for you at Ridgefield", Angel said, referring to one of Sunnydale's many cemeteries.

Buffy lowered her eyes, apologetically. "I'm sorry. Giles is on a training kick. I was too tired to patrol afterwards. You know though, if you got a cell-phone, this wouldn't be a problem." She smiled, mischievously.

"Ah..we're not going to have another technology discussion again, are we?", he shook his head. "A vampire with a cell-phone. Far too modern for me."

The Slayer relented. "All right. We'll discuss this later." Angel smiled again. There was a slight pause.

"Are you going to sit there all day or are you going to move so I can put some clothes on?", he asked, teasingly.

She blushed. "I suppose you can get dressed." She stood up and turned to face the wall. Behind her, she could hear the sheets rustling and drawers opening. Buffy decided that this was the best time to ask him what had been on her mind since she had left the library.

"So, like I said, Giles is on a training binge. And today we were talking about Slayer history. We found a picture of this Slayer from the forties. I know you were in America by then, but you probably stayed away from Slayers, so this might be a dumb question but I thought maybe you might have known her", Buffy blurted out, rapidly.

"What was her name?", Angel asked, his voice muffled by the shirt he was pulling over his head.

"Annaliese. Annaliese Janson."

He hesitated for a second. "I remember her."

Buffy spun around to face him. Fortunately, he was already dressed. "You do?"

He nodded. "She was a very good Slayer. I only saw her once, actually, here in Sunnydale. She was surrounded by about seven vamps, grossly outnumbered. I helped distract them away from her, but I didn't stay around to chat or anything. I didn't exactly feel like being around anyone back then. She died awhile after that."

"Yeah, Giles said she was killed by a demon trying to take over the world."

Angel frowned. "Not exactly."

"What do you mean?", Buffy puzzled. Giles was, she had noted, rarely wrong.

Her boyfriend sat back down on the bed. "I heard about the fight with the demon. She was badly hurt. But the demon wasn't what killed her. At least not directly."

"Then how did she die?" Buffy sat next to him.

"Miscarriage. She was pregnant, but she didn't know it. The fight brought it on. She died a few hours after she reached the hospital from complications, loss of blood."

Buffy put a hand to her mouth. "Oh my god. How horrible!"

Angel nodded. "At the time, I didn't think anything of it. Slayers....well...they die....sometimes."

"Yeah, but from vampires or demons or whatever's trying to destroy the world. Not from something like a miscarriage. I mean, we're

supposed to be strong, right?"

"She was strong", Angel corrected her. "But there's only so much the human body can take, Buffy."

"Slayers aren't normal human beings, Angel. You, of all people, should know that."

He gently took her hand. "What is this really about? This is a very un-Buffy-like conversation we're having."

Buffy stared down at her lap. "I don't know. I've had a feeling that something big is going to happen tonight, something dangerous. Then Giles wants to discuss dead Slayers, one in particular who died exactly fifty years ago. I don't like hearing that, Angel. I'm almost seventeen years old. I don't plan on dying again anytime soon."

"And that's part of what keeps you alive, Buffy. In the short time I've known you, you've done things that no Slayer has ever been able to do before because you're strong. And stubborn."

"Yeah, but look at Annaliese. She was strong, you said so yourself. And she died from something as relatively normal as a miscarriage. What's going to happen to me, Angel? How will I die?" A tear of frustration slipped down Buffy's cheek.

"You can't think like that and expect to stay alive for long. If you spend all your energy wondering how your life will end, you won't take the time to live it." He brushed the tear away, tenderly.

"After 240 years on this planet, you've gotten fairly smart", Buffy smiled through her tears.

"You'll be alright then?"

The Slayer nodded. "Yeah. Maybe I'll look in all those nice books Giles has and see if anything is *destined* to happen tonight." She stood up to go, but Angel, still holding her hand, pulled her back down.

"I'll find you tonight. And whatever happens, we'll handle it together." He kissed her, letting his cool fingers brush across her cheek.

"See you then", she whispered, breaking the kiss. With a little glance over her shoulder, she left the room.

"This is it", Buffy whispered to herself. Her quiet statement echoed throughout the empty library.

Apparently, the gang had found other things to do on a Saturday morning. She had had the library to herself for the past hour. She had spent the time looking through various books of prophecy that had proved useful in the past. And there it was in the Codex, the explanation to her feeling of dread. Buffy drew a shaky breath to

calm her rapidly beating heart. She leaned over the table and picked up Annaliese Janson's Watcher's diary. Flipping through it, she came upon the the entry she was looking for. As Buffy read, her feeling of dread was replaced by one of mounting fear. She set the diary aside and looked up at the ceiling to blink back hot tears.

"Tonight's the night."

Giles' brow wrinkled as he read the Codex. He had read these prophecies many times before, but until the acutal events started to fall into place, they were too cryptic to understand. "Please tell me I'm not right, Giles. Maybe I just read it wrong. Or maybe I read the wrong passage", Buffy pleaded, her eyes full of worry.

Her Watcher whipped off his glasses and rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. "I don't think so, Buffy. What you read is....accurate, as far as I can gather."

There was a moment of silence. "Then, I'm supposed to die tonight....again."

"What?", Willow cried from behind them. Giles and Buffy turned to see her and Xander standing in the library doorway. "Tell me that this is a funny thing.... please?" Buffy lowered her eyes, unable to answer.

"We have a knack for coming in during the middle of important converstations. So, care to fill us in?", Xander asked, keeping his tone light.

"According to the Codex, I'm....I'm going to....", Buffy couldn't go on.

"The Codex? Isn't that the book that said you were going to die when you faced the Master?", Willow inquired, her lower lip trembling. Giles nodded. "Well...it was wrong then....and it's..it's wrong now, Buffy. You're not going to die."

"It wasn't wrong, Will. I did die", Buffy replied, quietly. "I used my 'get out of jail free' card."

"No! I refuse to accept that", Xander declared. "How can some book that was written centuries ago dictate your life today?"

Buffy reached for the Codex. "'The demon shall try but he will not succeed. And after the earth has circled the sun fifty times, the barrier between then and now will be lifted and the Chosen One will again close her eyes, this time forever '", she read, flatly.

"That's why you think you're going to...you knw...tonight? That passage?", Xander exclaimed. "That doesn't tell you anything!"

Giles flipped through the fifty year old Watcher's diary. "'January 16, 1948. Annaliese died last night trying to stop the demon. He got away, yet the world woke up this morning. Only it woke up with a new

Slayer. I'll be taking her back to Chicago to be buried'."

"I told you something big was going to happen tonight", Buffy whispered.

"This is absolutely crazy! There has to be another meaning or maybe it's talking about something else", Xander said, firmly. He got no response. "Buffy, c'mon. You're not giving up, are you? Buffy? Say something!"

"Slayers die all the time, Xander. You didn't think I was going to be the exception, did you?", she finally replied, staring off into space.

"I guess I just hoped you wouldn't accept it so easily", Xander shot back.

"What am I supposed to do?", Buffy snapped to attention, angrily. "The Codex says I'm going to die. Why argue with fate? And just because I slipped past the last death prophecy doesn't mean I will this time. If you call that acceptance, then that's what it is. I'm accepting my destiny. Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?"

There was a long pause. "Buffy, you know that's not what I...", Giles began. His Slayer raised her hand quickly to silence him.

"I don't....I just...want to be alone for awhile. Okay?" Buffy closed her eyes, but the tears she had been fighting fell anyways.

As if to answer her, Willow stood up and walked over to her friend. She put her arms around Buffy and held her for a long moment. "I don't think that's really what you want right now", she said, quietly.

With those simple words, Buffy's stoic resolve dissolved. "I don't want to die, Will. I don't want to die again", she cried.

"And you're not going to", Willow replied, stroking Buffy's hair.

"I won't let you", Xander said, determinedly.

Buffy wanted to believe them. But even she knew how powerful a book the Codex was. More powerful, at least, than the resolve of a group of high school juniors. "Thank you", she said anyways, brushing away the tears. "I really...you don't know how much you....mean to me."

Willow smiled. "Probably as much as you mean to us." She hugged her friend once again.

"I hate to...um...interrupt this, but we do have some major plans to form before tonight", Giles announced from his place across the table. "First of all, we need to find out what demon Annaliese fought and what she did to stop him the first time."

Buffy stared at her Watcher. "What?"

"What do you mean, what? Did you think I was just going to send you out there to fight and..." He took a deep breath to avoid saying the word. "...without trying to figure out some way for you to come

through the situation?"

The Slayer was at a momentary loss for words. "Well...no. But what happened to your very Watcher-ey 'accept your destiny always' philosophy?"

Giles cleared his throat. "I may not always express it in terms that an American teenager would be quick to recognize, but you are my Slayer, Buffy. And it is not my job, nor would I ever wish to send you to your death, pre-determined or not."

"Let me translate that", Xander said, eagerly. "He feels the same way we do about you, Buff. But he's English and can't actually say it."

"Thank you, Xander", Giles muttered, throwing the boy a despairing look.

"So!", Willow exclaimed, with an abundance of enthusiasm. "Where do we start? Ooh!! I can look on the internet and see what I come up with!"

The corners of Giles' lips turned up at her eagerness. "Actually Willow, the terrible thing might not be able to help us this time, and I do use the word 'help' loosely. I think everything we need to know is going to be in actual books."

Willow looked crestfallen. "But..that's my role. Net girl. Hacker Slayerette."

"I'm sure you'll be able to find something, Will", Buffy reassured her. Willow's smile returned as she skipped happily over to the library's computer. The Slayer looked at her Watcher. "Wait a minute. Doesn't the diary tell about the demon Annaliese fought? Isn't that, like, the whole point of a Watcher's diary?"

"The diary is sketchy, like I mentioned before. Not all Watchers are as...fastidious as others. Also, it was a very hard time for him. He left a lot out.....almost everything about the demon and its plans", Giles replied.

During this exchange, Xander had picked up the diary and thumbed through it. "Hey Giles", he called. "What is the Book of Foth?"

Giles looked puzzled. "It's an ancient Germanic volume....sort of an encyclopedia of mystical creatures. Why?"

"Cause it's mentioned, like, twice in the diary." Xander pointed to a particular passage.

Buffy's Watcher quickly read the page. "Well, that's a start. I have a copy of the Book somewhere around here. I just have to find it...." His voice faded as he went off to search for the volume.

"Good job, Xander." Buffy patted his shoulder, awkwardly. There was a lingering wierdness between the two friends ever since a tiny little dance at the Bronze that no one seemed to be able to forget.

"Well, that's **my** role. I'm

Stumble-Across-the-Solution-Inadvertantly Slayerette", he smiled, weakly.

Buffy shook her head. "You're far more than that." Xander looked down at his scruffy sneakers to hide a wide grin. Neither one realized that Willow was well within earshot.

"I...I have to go to...the bathroom", she announced, shakily rising to go.

Xander looked puzzled. "Will?" His life-long friend ignored him as she ran out the library doors. "What was that all about?", he asked Buffy.

"You truly have no idea, do you?", she replied, sadly. Xander continued to look confused. "Never mind. I think I'll go help Giles." The Slayer started up the steps to the second level.

Ten minutes later, the group reconvened around the library table.

"This is what Buffy and I found from the Book of Foth and various clues in the diary. The demon Annaliese fought was called Zeitlos, which in German means 'timeless'", Giles translated for the teenagers.

"Timeless", Buffy repeated, thoughtfully.

Willow, who had seemingly forgiven the earlier incident, read her friend's thoughts. "'The barrier between then and now will be lifted", she recalled, from memory.

"Zeitlos is a time-traveler!", Xander put all the pieces together, triumphantly.

Giles looked at the Slayerettes with pride. "That was my guess as well."

Buffy stood up and paced around for a few seconds. "So, the question is, why would Zeitlos, a time-traveling demon, reappear fifty years after he failed to take over the world?"

"He's planning on going back to 1948 to finish what he started?", Willow hypothesized.

Buffy nodded. "And I'm going to have to stop him." She swallowed. "At least...I hope I can."

"I have every confidence that you will", Giles assured his Slayer. "You must. Our entire existence depends on it. If Zeitlos succeeds, he will alter everything that happened back in 1948. Even a tiny change in the past, let alone a demon taking over the world, would completely dissintigrate the present. Bearing that in mind, we have to figure out where all of this is going to take place."

"Angel said that he met Annaliese here in Sunnydale awhile before she died. Wouldn't it stand to reason that she was here to fight Zeitlos since she didn't live in Sunnydale?" Buffy looked around for confirmation.

"You...you saw Angel today?", Giles asked, trying to keep his voice neutral.

The Slayer sighed. "Yes, I do still see Angel, Giles. I'm different from every other girl anyways. Why not be the only one who's boyfriend is a 240 year-old vampire? I really don't see the problem."

"I think the key part of that problem is the phrase '240 year-old vampire', Buff", Xander said, darkly.

"Way off the subject here", Willow broke in. Buffy threw her a grateful look. "If Annaliese died in Sunnydale, there should be a records. I can hack into the city's files. I mean...then we'd know for sure."

"Good idea. Willow, you get on that", Giles instructed. "Wait a minute. Would a death that happened fifty years ago be on the computer files?"

Willow turned to look back at the Watcher. "The Sunnydale Historical Society just spent two years updating the city's online records. Births, marriages and deaths going all the way back to the turn of the century." The gang stared at her. "What? My grandmother is part of the society."

Giles rubbed his eyes. "The whole world has fallen victim to the charms of the horrible machine."

"Join us here in the twentieth century, G-man", Xander said, slapping the older man's back, heartily. "The girls wear spandex, Twinkies come in boxes of twelve and a bunch of old women know more about the internet than you do."

"Maybe Ms. Calendar could help you overcome your fears", Buffy suggested, innocently. Seeing the look Giles gave her, she busied herself looking through the Book of Foth.

"Why don't we all just get to work." Giles straightened his sweater-vest. But as hard as he tried, he couldn't keep a small smile from his lips at the thought of his lovely co-worker. Buffy looked up and caught the smile. She grinned widely behind the book. Whatever happened tonight, she predicted a long and happy future for the unofficial couple.

"She died in Sunnydale!", Willow exclaimed a few minutes later. The group gathered around the computer. "See, it's right here. Annaliese Imogene Janson. Died at Sunnydale Memorial Hospital, January 15, 1948 from complications due to....." Willow took a deep breath. "From complications due to miscarriage." Buffy looked at her friend's faces as they took in the news she already knew.

"I guess she and her Watcher really were in love", Xander commented, unnecessarily.

Willow lowered her head slightly. "No wonder he was so sad fifty years later. He didn't just lose his Slayer. He lost the woman he loved and his child."

"That's the death certificate, right?", Giles asked the red-haired

girl. She nodded. "Is there a newspaper article about her death?"

"Like an obituary? I can look", Willow bit her lip and began typing furiously. A second later she had pulled up the Sunnydale Times archive files. She scrolled down for the right date. "January 16.....here's the obituaries. 'Originally from Chicago, survived by her guardian, James Wellborn'. That must be her Watcher. It doesn't say husband."

"Well so much for my parent's insistence that no one before our generation had pre-marital sex", Xander said, flippantly. He was ignored.

"Hold on a sec. Scroll back up to the local headlines, Will", Buffy leaned in closer to the computer screen as Willow complied. "Stop! There it is." She pointed to a particular article.

Giles read aloud. "The police and fire brigade were called to Weatherly Park last night to investigate a reported brush fire. Despite several calls from local citizens, they were unable to find any evidence of a fire taking place in or around the area. The investigation is ongoing, but the police are doubtful that any new information will surface. 'There's no burned trees, no ashes, absolutely nothing to indicate a fire', Sunnydale Chief of Police, George Stanson says. However, the citizens who reported the occurrence stand by their claim. 'There was a huge circle of light', Margaret Rodgers tells. 'If that wasn't a fire, then what could it have been?'"

Buffy looked at her Watcher. "Perhaps a time portal opening?"

He indicated his agreement. "Weatherly Park. Now we know where to go. We just need a plan of attack."

"Here's one. I go to the park, kick the demon's ass before he can do the timewarp again and then.....and then if I make it past that point, I'll think of more." Hearing no voices of dissent, Buffy nodded firmly. "Okay then, let's do it."

"So...when is this going to happen?", Buffy asked her Watcher, her teeth chattering slightly.

Giles looked up at the dark sky. "Soon, I think." His Slayer gave him a look. "Well, actually, I don't know."

"Now was that so hard to admit?", she teased. She pulled her coat tighter around her slender body as a gust of wind swept through the park.

He grimaced slightly. "Harder than one would think."

"I'm surprised you didn't give me another round of your infamous 'half of slaying is waiting' speech."

Giles shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I only use that

on special occasions."

"Ooh.....give the Watcher two points for that comeback. But the Slayer is still in the lead", Buffy said, sassily. She could see Giles smile into the darkness. A comfortable pause settled over the slaying duo. "Giles?" Buffy broke the silence. Hearing his responding "hmm?", she continued. "Do you think I shouldn't see Angel?"

Her Watcher drew in a small breath. "Do you really want my opinion?"

"Would I ask you if I didn't?" She rubbed her hands together for warmth.

"Well then. I've actually been giving this...um..a lot of thought. At first, I was completely opposed to it. A Slayer becoming romantically entangled with a vampire goes against everything the Council has been striving to do since the dawn of time." Buffy cut him off before he could continue.

"But he's not like that. He's..." Giles silenced her.

"I know he's not. There are mitigating circumstances. Which is why I..I think you should do what you think is right in this situation", he told her, honestly.

She grinned. "Really? You're not just saying that?"

"I'm not saying it...uh...thrills me, Buffy. But it's not my descision to make." Giles dug his hands deeper into the pockets of his pants. "And Angel is a good....man, I suppose is the right word."

"That's what I call him", Buffy snickered.

Giles held up his hands in mock protest. "Please don't say anymore. That's all I need to....." There was a loud snapping sound from the nearby wooded area. "...hear."

Buffy jumped to her feet and, out of habit, pulled a stake from inside her coat. "What do you think it is? A vamp? Zeitlos?", she asked her Watcher, a little breathlessly.

A figure burst from the woods. "C; none of the above", it announced. "Just a bored Slayerette."

"Xander!", Buffy yelled as soon as she had recovered from her momentary shock. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Xander brushed some stray foilage from his dark hair. "I'm selling my body for chocolate." Seeing their angry looks, he smiled winningly. "Kidding. I thought I could help you slay or help Giles watch."

Buffy threw up her hands. "What on earth am I going to do with you, Xander?"

"Naughty things?", he guessed, hopefully, earning him an incredibly hard punch on the shoulder from the Slayer and disapproving look from her Watcher. "C'mon! Don't tell me that I can't be of some small

use."

His friend rolled her eyes towards the sky. "Fine. You can stay. But I don't want you rushing in to play John Wayne if and when Zeitlos shows up, okay? I'm the Slayer; let me do the dirty work."

"Scout's honor", Xander said, taking a break from rubbing his shoulder to put one hand over his heart.

Buffy felt Giles tug on the sleeve of her coat. "What?", she asked.

"He's over there", Giles whispered. "It's now or never." The Slayer peered into the darkness in the general direction her Watcher was pointing. She could make out a large figure moving erratically.

"How do you know it's him and not just a large homeless man?", Xander asked, a little louder than Buffy would have liked.

"It has horns, Xander", she said. Taking a deep breath, Buffy straightened her shoulders and began to walk towards the demon. Xander and Giles watched as she reached him and cleared her throat loudly. "So, do you have a permit for opening a time portal in a public place?", she quipped, folding her arms across her chest, authoritatively. Zeitlos spun around to face her. "Who the hell are you?", he snarled.

"Take a wild guess, and if you say a dead girl, I'm going to be sorely disappointed in your lack of creativity." Buffy made an obvious gesture to her stake.

The demon's grotesque lips curled up in some semblance of a half-smile. "You're fiesty, even for a Slayer." Buffy nodded happily. "But didn't anyone tell you, little one? Stakes don't bother me", Zeitlos continued.

"Who said I was going to kill you with this?", Buffy replied, tossing the stake to the side before using her powerful leg to kick the demon's face. He reeled backwards. "I find that a lot more effective."

Zeitlos recovered quickly. "Now you are a dead girl", he growled. "Slayer or not." He backhanded her, sending her flying several feet to the ground. Giles held Xander back before he could run to his fallen friend. It took several seconds for the stars to stop dancing before Buffy's eyes. By the time she had, Zeitlos had somehow managed to complete whatever means were necessary to open his time portal. She staggered to her feet to try to somehow stop him, but he grabbed the back of her coat and lifted her into the air. At that moment, Xander broke away from Giles and ran over to them.

"Let her go!", he yelled, kicking the back of the demon's knee. Zeitlos faltered slightly, allowing Buffy to break free.

"Run Xander!", she cried, before Zeitlos grabbed ahold of her again. But Xander didn't obey. Instead, he rammed his body into the demon, causing as much damage as a fly bumping into a brick wall. Zeitlos let out a hardly laugh. With his free hand, the demon began to choke Xander. This was too much for Giles who ran to help the two teenagers. To distract Zeitlos, Giles picked up a rock and threw it,

hitting the demon's eye. Zeitlos roared with pain, but didn't let up. Behind them, the time portal grew in size. Buffy mustered all of her strength and kicked the demon's groin. It was a cheap shot, but it worked. Zeitlos let go of both her and Xander. Apparently, Buffy had really hurt the demon. He threw out one powerful arm to steady himself, sending Buffy and Xander flying towards the open portal.

The last thing they heard before blacking out was Giles calling their names.

Buffy groaned as she groggily sat up. The ground felt wet beneath her, which was puzzling. She couldn't remember it having rained. Blinking to focus her eyes, she noticed Xander lying next to her. She reached over and shook her friend.

"Xander!", she cried. "Are you okay?"

His head came up suddenly as he looked around, confused. "Buffy? What happened?"

The Slayer shook her head. "I have no idea. Zeitlos must have hit us hard. I can't remember."

Xander sat up, far too quickly, he soon realized. "Oh....my head", he moaned. "Maybe it's a concussion and I can miss school for a few days....or weeks."

"Thank goodness. You two are all right", a voice from behind them said.

Both Buffy and Xander turned their heads. They didn't recognize the voice; it certainly wasn't Giles'. It appeared to belong to a girl, about their age, but no one they remembered from school. She was dressed a little backward for a town so near Los Angeles and her hair was in an unfamiliar style. When neither friend responded to the girl, she looked concerned.

"You are all right, are you not?", she asked, kneeling down to their level.

Buffy put a hand to her forehead. "Um...yeah. We're okay. A little wiggled out, but we'll survive. How long have you been there?"

The girl looked puzzled. "You don't remember?"

"Should we?" Xander sized up the girl. She was cute in a very old-fashioned way.

"Perhaps it's just as well", she said, almost to herself. "You probably wouldn't believe it anyways."

Buffy snorted. "I doubt that." She attempted standing up. The girl took hold of her arm to help her up.

"You might want to rest for awhile. You had quite a hard hit to the head, from what I can tell."

Not used to being helped, Buffy politely shook off the girl's grip. "Thanks, I'm pretty sure I can handle it."

The girl looked like she wanted to say something more, but she was cut off the entrance of another stranger. "Annie", he said, coming to a stop before them. Noticing Buffy and Xander, his anxious tone changed to one of forced calm. "Did you...take care of the problem?"

"Yes", she replied. "I did." The obviously British man gestured to them. "They got caught in the crossfire", she continued.

Buffy helped Xander to his feet. They exchanged a look.

"Can I talk to you for a second, Annie?", the man asked, taking her aside.

Xander turned to his friend once they were out of earshot. "What is going on here?" Buffy had no answer. She looked over at the strange couple. There was something so familiar about the girl. She couldn't quite place it. It wasn't until the girl turned her head slightly to the right and smiled at the man that the pieces finally fell into place. The Slayer gasped.

"Xander.....I don't think we're in Kansas anymore", she whispered. "What?"

Buffy looked around. The park was so clean, almost brand new. The elaborate children's playground a few yards away had disappeared. It was replaced by see-saw and a swing. Everything looked so old-fashioned. Old fashioned.... "We went through the time portal."

Xander stared at her for several seconds. "Oh no.....no.....we didn't.....did we?" Buffy nodded. "Then...we're in....."

"1948", she supplied for him. "Which means, those two people over there are probably...."

Her friend slapped his forehead. "Annaliese and her Watcher. How come we didn't recognize her right away!"

"She said we got hit on the head", Buffy pointed out. "I can't believe this is actually happening! I feel like if I pinch myself, I'll wake up back in my bed."

Xander gave his arm a hard pinch. "Not gonna happen, Buff."

"I don't know what to do then. I mean, if this is all real, what are we supposed to do? Should we tell them who we are? Would they even believe us? God, I wish Giles was here!" Buffy squatted on her heels in defeat. Xander followed suit.

"Look, Buffy, it's going to be okay. Let me handle this." He patted her back before straightening up. "Hey there!", he called out to Annaliese. "We're having kind of a debate over here. I think it's Monday and she..." He pointed to Buffy. "...she thinks it's Tuesday. Can you help us out?"

"Really smooth, Xander", Buffy muttered.

Annaliese and her Watcher exchanged their own look. She took a step towards them. "It's neither. Today is Friday."

Xander exaggerated a nod. "Ah yes.....and that would be what date again?"

"January 14th", she replied, concern growing. "Are you positive that you are all right?"

Buffy stood up. "Actually, we're not. We want to know what happened. To us."

"I was out patrolling....um.....taking a walk", Annaliese corrected herself, too late. "There were some...ruffians about and they most likely attacked you. I think I must have frightened them away."

Buffy decided to take a chance. "Oh, now I remember", she lied. "Their faces were horrible. And they had fangs." Annaliese's eyes flew open and she looked over at her Watcher.

Xander caught onto Buffy's game. "Yeah, they did. And they tried to bite our necks."

"Are you sure?", Annaliese asked, seemingly stalling for time.

The two teenagers nodded. "It was almost as if they were.....oh but that's silly", Buffy said.

"Almost as if they were what?", the Watcher prompted.

Xander laughed outrageously. "Vampires."

Annaliese was visibly flabbergasted. "Um....James..." She looked to the man for help. The older, yet, Buffy couldn't help noticing, handsome man walked over to them.

"How do you know about....", he started before Buffy cut him off.

"Let's just say that we know a lot of things that most people don't know. For one, does the name Zeitlos ring a bell?" She was happy to see the reaction on Annaliese and James' faces.

"Uh...Buffy?", Xander made a slashing motion across his throat. "Ix-nay on the Eitlos-Zay."

"You know about Zeitlos?", Annaliese asked, once she had recovered from the slight shock. "How? Are you demon-hunters?" She paused. "Or demons?"

Buffy held up one hand. "I can't tell you very much. But what I can tell you is that we are the good guys."

Xander nodded to emphasize his friend's point. "Yep. We don't drink blood, eat babies or virgins, or try to destroy the world."

The strange Slayer laughed at this. "Well, that's a relief." She

turned to her Watcher. "I think we're done for the night. I don't see any sign of Zeitlos. Except for that group the other day, there aren't too many vamps in this town."

He agreed. "Not like New York." They both smiled at what seemed to be a private joke.

Annaliese turned to Buffy and Xander. "I'm Annaliese Janson and this is my Wat....James Wellborn. What are your names? Do you live in Sunnydale?"

"Yes", Buffy said, out of habit. Then she thought better. "Well, no. Not this Sunnydale, anyways." She got yet another strange look from the couple. "What I mean is, our town in...um...Kansas is called Sunnydale. It's kind of confusing. Oh, and I'm....Buffy and he's Xander."

"Where are you staying, Buffy? We might need to get in contact with you", James asked, adjusting his glasses in a way that reminded Buffy so much of Giles. But to his question, neither Buffy nor Xander could think of an answer.

"Why don't you stay with us?", Annaliese offered. "That way we wouldn't have to search Sunnydale for you."

Her Watcher didn't seem too thrilled at this prospect, but Buffy nodded. "Thanks. We'd appreciate that." The matter seemingly settled, Annaliese linked arms with James and they began to walk towards the road. Buffy moved to follow them, but Xander grabbed ahold of her sleeve and held her back.

"What are you doing, Buff? We need to figure out how to get back to our time and we're not going to do that by playing houseguests."

She removed his fingers from her coat. "Relax, Xander. I couldn't exactly tell them who we really are, could I? And they're our best shot at not only getting back to 1998, but also in defeating Zeitlos when we do."

"All right", Xander said, reluctantly. "But I want you to know, this all makes no sense."

"I'll explain more later. For now, let's just get out of the park, okay?" Xander nodded and they followed after the Slayer and Watcher.

"The town looks....nice", Buffy whispered to Xander. They were seated in the backseat of James Wellborn's car, a model that Buffy had only seen in movies and museums.

"It looks like an episode of 'The Andy Griffith Show', Buff. Gives me the creeps." Xander peered out the window.

"So", Annaliese interrupted, turning around to see the backseat passengers. "Have you been to Sunnydale before? This Sunnydale, I mean."

Xander half-snorted. "We're regular guests of the Hellmouth." As soon as the world was out of his mouth, he realized his mistake.

"The Hellmouth?", James repeated, excitedly. "You think the Hellmouth is here?"

Buffy pinched her friend's arm. "Nice going, slick", she hissed. Raising her voice, she attempted to cover Xander's blunder. "Well....we've...um...heard about a lot of underworld activity here....which...uh, is why we come here so often. The Hellmouth is more of a....a pet name we have for Sunnydale."

"Oh." The Watcher relaxed a little.

"James has devoted most of his life to discovering where the mouth to Hell opens. He'll find it someday." Annaliese looked at her Watcher with devotion and obvious love.

"It's about a hundred yards that way", Xander muttered, jerking his head slightly to the right as they passed by a much newer looking Sunnydale High School. He recieved another hard pinch from Buffy.

"May I remind you that Giles discovers the Hellmouth, not James. Are you *trying* to mess up the future?", Buffy whispered, harshly. He shrugged, carelessly.

"You know, there is something so familiar about you", Annaliese said, returning her attention to Buffy. "I feel as though we....I don't know....have a lot in common. Isn't that strange?"

The nineties Slayer smiled. "Not really."

Annaliese searched for something more to say. "I like your.....pants. I've never seen a woman wear pants in public before. I sometimes wish I could though."

Buffy decided to take another great chance. "It would probably make slaying a lot easier. Yes, I know you're a Slayer", she answered the girl's unspoken question.

"How do you know so much about us?", James asked, suspiciously.

She wanted to tell them, but the fear of inadvertantly altering the future was too great. "I just do. But trust me, your secret is safe." Annaliese nodded, but her look of worry didn't completely go away. The rest of their journey passed in silence. Buffy was suprised when the last leg of the trip took them to Revello Drive.

"The boarding house we're staying at is very nice. This little old couple run it and I'm sure they wouldn't mind if you stayed as well." Annaliese told the two teenagers as her Watcher pulled the car in front of a large, familiar looking house.

"Thanks. We appreciate it", Buffy replied, politely. Suddenly she realized why the house looked so familiar. Her voice dropped back to a whisper. "Xander....we're at my house."

"I told you, this whole thing is creepy, Buff. Very creepy." Xander climbed out of the car.

It wasn't exactly her house, she noticed right away after exiting the car. Somewhere in the next fifty years, someone had obviously renovated it. But the basic structure was the same. "This does seem a tad too coincidental, doesn't it? Like the fates are playing a big old practical joke on me", Buffy stared up at the house.

Annaliese called to them from the front porch. "Are you two coming?" Xander and Buffy hurried up the steps and into the house. "The Steins have already retired for the night, so we can't get you a room. But there are plenty of couches downstairs that you could take. Is that all right?"

Buffy nodded. "It's only for one night, after all", she said, under her breath.

"Good morning!", Annaliese's voice greeted Buffy as she sleepily stumbled into the kitchen. "Are you hungry? Mrs. Stein made breakfast for everyone." The little old lady at the stove smiled at Buffy before shuffling out of the room.

"Yes...thank you. I'm starving." Buffy sat across from Annaliese and helped herself to some eggs and toast. "I'd better leave some for Xander, though. He can down an entire box of HoHo's in a sitting."

"HoHo's?"

"They're something we eat at home..." Buffy shook some salt on her eggs before taking a bite. Better to keep her mouth occupied before she said too much.

Annaliese set down her cup of tea. "Tell me more about your home. I'd like to hear all about it."

Buffy swallowed and quickly reached to pour a glass of orange juice. "Well...where I come from...oh geez. What can I say about Sunnydale....Kansas?"

"It must be a very interesting...modern place." Annaliese gestured to Buffy's tight fitting exercise pants and tank top.

The nineties Slayer suddenly wished she had left her overcoat on. "Uh...yeah. It is. Interesting. Even without the vampires and demons."

Annaliese shook her head. "I still can not get over the fact that you know about all of it...about me. And you're so calm about it, too. Have you ever staked a vampire?"

Buffy snorted into her glass. "Just a few times." Xander suddenly appeared in the doorway looking as rumpled and groggy as Buffy felt. "Morning sleepyhead. I saved you some eggs." She pushed the plate across the table, towards him.

"Thanks", he mumbled, slumping into a chair beside Annaliese.

"Buffy was just telling me about your hometown", Annaliese said, brightly. "She says it's a very interesting place to live." Xander, who might as well have still been asleep, simply nodded and offered no further information. With growing frustration, Annaliese played with the small, silver snowflake that hung at her throat. "Does anyone want to listen to the radio?" Without waiting for an answer, she went to the very large brown box in the corner of the room and played with the heavy dial. A moment later, staticky music filled the kitchen. Buffy recognized the tune as something she had heard playing in the nursing home her grandmother had once stayed in.

"Don't you just adore Benny Goodman?", Annaliese began to hum along with the tune.

Xander, beginning to really wake up, reached for the toast. "More than life itself." If she could have been inconspicuous, Buffy would have pinched him.

Just then, James came into the kitchen. "Good morning", he said, pleasantly, to Xander and Buffy, followed by a much more personal, "Morning", to Annaliese. The older Slayer's face lit up at the sight of her Watcher. "How are you feeling today?", he asked her, concerned.

"Fine, much better than yesterday morning. It must have just been a little stomach bug. Mr. Stein left the paper for you." Annaliese picked it up and handed it to James. "I looked through it; no vampire attacks that I could see."

James still looked uncomfortable talking about such things in front of the two newcomers. "Good...thank you." He sat down and began to read.

"Do you all just plan to stay in town until Zeitlos makes his move?" Buffy sipped her juice.

Annaliese nodded, still humming. "It should be soon. We've been here for almost a week. What about you?"

"The same", Buffy replied, truthfully. The Benny Goodman song ended suddenly and after a second, the opening notes of a new song began to play. Annaliese smiled widely.

"I adore this song! If you don't like Goodman, you must like Sinatra", she told the two teenagers. "He is rather dreamy." She winked at her Watcher, teasingly.

Buffy couldn't help but picture the old man she knew Frank Sinatra as. "Oh yeah...dreamy."

"Heaven...I'm in heaven...and my heart beats so, that I can hardly speak....and I seem to find the happiness I seek....when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek", Annaliese sang along. "Let's dance!" She took ahold of James' wrist. Laughing, he set down his paper and stood to dance with her. Buffy watched the couple. It was heart-breaking to think of how this romance would ultimately end. She picked up the paper James had set aside. The Sunnydale Times, January 15, 1948. January 15. One hand went to her mouth in shock as she realized the significance of the day.

"Xander", she whispered, nudging his elbow. "It's all going to happen today. Today is January 15th."

He looked at Buffy for a long moment, then glanced over at the older Slayer, laughing as her Watcher swung her around the kitchen floor. "Oh god....time travel sucks", he replied, more serious than Buffy had ever heard him be before.

Buffy shook her head. "She doesn't deserve what's going to happen to her tonight." Suddenly, an idea began to form in her mind. "Of course....it doesn't have to happen that way."

Xander seemed to read her mind. "Buffy....if you're thinking what I think you're thinking, un-think it right now. You can't save Annaliese and not affect the future. You were listening to Giles do his 'dangers of altering time' lecture; hell, you pinched me incredibly hard last night for mentioning the location of the Hellmouth!"

"Yeah, but...."

"No 'buts', Buff. We will participate in tonight's events in one way: running for the portal when it opens and praying that it leads back to 1998." Xander was firm.

"When did you become group-leader boy?" Buffy fought back the urge to stick her tongue out at him.

He took a gulp of her orange juice. "About the same time you became go-against-the-laws-of-time-and-space girl."

Annaliese interrupted their conversation. "Come and dance with us, you two!"

"That's okay", Buffy politely refused.

Xander nodded emphatically. "We're not really good at dancing. Mostly because we don't know how to."

"Oh, everybody can waltz. Sure you won't give it a try?", Annaliese asked. Seeing them shake their heads, she shrugged and returned her attention to her own dance.

Buffy watched the couple for another minute. "How do we know that saving Annaliese would really affect the future that much? I mean, if everything is pre-destined, then even if she did live a little longer, I'd still eventually become the Slayer. Right?"

"You can't know that for sure, though. I mean...what if Annaliese did live and she lived so long that the girl who was supposed to be called next, died before she could be called, then someone else was called who wasn't supposed to be and then she lived a long time and..." Buffy held up her hand to stop him.

"Okay, okay. I get the picture", she said, dismissing the subject, from the conversation, but not from the back of her mind.

The song on the radio ended and a man's voice came on with the news. Buffy watched James tenderly kiss the back of Annaliese's hand. Life....it was so damn unfair sometimes.

"Why are people staring at me?", Buffy asked Annaliese, as they walked towards the center of 1948 Sunnydale. She looked down at her clothes. "Oh...never mind."

Annaliese looked around at the staring citizens. "Are you sure you're okay? There's a Woolworth's up a few blocks....you could buy a dress or two, if you want."

"That's okay. I won't be here long enough to....um....the pants are okay." Buffy mentally slapped her forehead. "Besides, Xander in a dress is a frightening idea."

The older Slayer laughed. "You've got a great sense of humor, Buffy. I'm almost sad that once Zeitlos is dead, James and I will be going back to Chicago. I'd like to get to know you better."

Buffy nodded, unsure of how to answer that. "So...you and James....it's, like, serious?"

"Yes...I think it is", Annaliese answered, after a moment of thought. "He's....he's everything. I don't know what I'd do without him." She blushed, realizing she was talking to a practical stranger. "I'm sorry...I didn't mean to get quite so personal."

"Nothing to apologize for. Has he asked you to...I don't know, marry him?", Buffy phrased her question carefully.

Her blushed deepened, giving away the answer. "About three weeks ago. He gave me this...." She pulled the tiny snowflake from under the collar of her blouse. "...on Christmas Eve. He said he'd get me a ring as soon as he could, but honestly, the necklace is perfect."

Buffy choked on the lump in her throat. "It's beautiful. You two seem...very happy." The younger Slayer had to look away. "So...they already have...I mean, there is a magick shop in town, right?"

"James said he saw one the other day. His sense of direction is a little off though. I don't see anything." Annaliese shielded her eyes from the sun to see her surroundings better.

"I think it might be over there", Buffy innocently pointed in the direction she knew the magick shop in 1998 Sunnydale was located. The location hadn't changed; the two Slayers headed into the store. It wasn't an official magick shop, Buffy could tell right away. But hidden behind the "normal" gardening supplies and herb plants, were the tools of witchcraft.

Annaliese dug a list out of her handbag and handed it to the shopkeeper. "Can we get these things?", she asked, quietly. The girl nodded and headed into the backrooms.

"This spell, it's supposed to keep Zeitlos from doing what, again?" Buffy played with the leaves of an aloe plant.

"James thinks that Zeitlos is going to go back in time to bring back

some of the world's worst men....assembling an army, if you will. Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini...men like that. We've been tracking Zeitlos all the way to Sunnydale; this is definitely the place he's going to do it. This spell will, in theory, stop him from opening any portals to the past." Annaliese shook her head. "It goes without saying that we have to stop Zeitlos at any cost." She paused. "I was called...after the last Slayer died. She died in one of Hitler's work camps....Bergen Belsen, I think James said it was. We didn't find out until after the war; we always assumed she had simply lost a fight. It doesn't seem quite fair, does it? She had to die in that horrible place, simply because of her faith, to make me what I am today."

Buffy shook her head slowly. "It's not fair at all", she whispered. "But it comes with the job...I suppose."

"It's frustrating the daylights out of me...there's something about you that I just can't put my finger on. I feel like I could tell you anything...and you'd understand."

Before Buffy could answer, the shopkeeper came back with a paper bag. "Five dollars", she told Annaliese. Buffy smiled to herself. Five dollars in 1998 wouldn't even buy a sage wand, but here, they had purchased the workings for an entire spell for the same amount.

Annaliese counted out the bills, took the bag and thanked the woman. She and Buffy left the store. "I could learn to live in Sunnydale", Annaliese confessed, as they began the walk back to Revello Drive. "It's January, and it's balmy outside. There's a magick shop. The people are all nice." She took a small, satisfied breath. "It's the perfect place to raise a family."

"This is torture, Xander. We've got to get out of here", Buffy cornered her friend, once she and Annaliese arrived back at the house. "I can't take it...her life is too damn perfect! And it's all about to end. I can't take it anymore!"

Xander put his hands on Buffy's shoulders. "Buff...relax. You've got to calm down. Now, I know this is tough, believe me. I've just spent an hour listening to James hum Frank Sinatra. But we just have to hold out for a few hours and then we can go home."

"But what if we don't get to go home? What if this spell works and Zeitlos can't open any time portals! Then we'll be stuck here forever!"

"That's not going to happen. I've been thinking this out. If you and I take over doing the spell, we can wait until he's already opened the portal...hopefully the one he's planning on opening to take back to 1998....and then do the spell, making him unable to open anymore. Then you and I make a run for it and the rest, as they say, is history." Xander looked at the Slayer for approval. "Am I good or am I good?"

Buffy glanced down at the polished, wood floor. "It's a good plan; it's our only plan." She chewed on her lower lip. "They're engaged. That necklace, he gave it to her when he asked her to marry him. And

she's pregnant....Xander, they don't even know that yet."

"You can't keep thinking about that, Buffy. It all...sucks, to put it mildly. But you've got to remember, this has all happened before. It's just the way things have to be. We're the fluke here; we're the part that's not supposed to be. And I don't know about you, but I'd rather not be the guy who screws up history."

"You're right....I know you're right. But, promise me something." Buffy waited for Xander's nod before she continued. "Promise me we'll be gone before...before she gets hurt. Before she dies."

He hung his head for a second. "I can't promise that, Buff. All I can do is say, we'll do everything in our power to be gone before it happens. All right?"

Annaliese came into the room before Buffy could answer. "We're getting ready to go out; are you two coming?"

Xander thought of something. "How do you know to go to Weatherly Park?" The words were out of his mouth before he realized what he had just said.

The older Slayer gave him a strange look. "Weatherly Park? James wants to look there again?" Buffy and Xander shrugged, innocently. "I suppose it's as good a starting point as any. I'll go suggest it to James." She disappeared around a corner.

"Ooops....my bad", Xander said, under the weight of Buffy's glare. "Hey, they were going to figure it out eventually, right? I just leant a helping hand."

"So, the line between helping out and completely screwing up the future is drawn where?", Buffy asked, folding her arms across her chest.

Xander put a hand to his heart. "Touche." He got serious again. "Are you going to be able to do this, Buff?"

She paused before nodding. "Yeah. But you're right....time travel does suck."

"More coffee anyone?", James asked, holding up the thermos Mrs. Stein had packed for their "late night picnic". Getting no replies, he set it down on the bench. "Who suggested we stake out Weatherly Park, again, and why?"

Xander, prompted by Buffy's jab to his ribs, meagerly raised his hand. "A little bird told me to?"

Annaliese smiled at him and placed a hand on James' arm. "Let's give it a little while longer." James gave in, and said nothing more.

A gust of wind swept over the group; Buffy was glad to have her jacket on. The surrounding park was almost completely pitch-black. The absence of light unnerved Buffy. Zeitlos could be right behind them, and they wouldn't know until it was too late. She stood up from the bench she shared with Xander and walked a few feet into the

darkness. Annaliese unhooked her arm from James' and followed her.

"Are you all right?", she asked Buffy.

The younger Slayer indicated that she was. "I could ask the same of you; you've been wringing your hands since we got here."

Annaliese's arms dropped to her sides. "I was hoping no one would notice. It's hard to explain....I just feel like something....bad is going to happen tonight." She chuckled. "It's probably nothing at all."

"Probably", Buffy replied, choking on the word.

"But, what if it is something?", she could see Annaliese's smooth forehead crinkling. "What if something does happen to James...or even me tonight?"

Buffy lifted her shoulders. "You...you shouldn't think that way...I guess."

"I know. And I'm sure if Zeitlos does show up tonight, I won't be thinking about it. But just in case..." She reached behind her neck and unclasped her necklace. "I want you to hold onto this." She took Buffy's hand, placed the delicate silver snowflake in her palm, and closed Buffy's fingers around it.

"Annaliese...I can't take this....", Buffy began.

"Well, I'd like to have it back if everything goes as it should", Annaliese laughed. "But, please....hold onto it for tonight." Buffy nodded and slipped into her back pocket. "All right...I feel a little better now."

Suddenly, there was a loud crash from the nearby children's play area. James was on his feet before the two Slayers could even turn their heads to see what it was.

"Is this it?", Annaliese asked her Watcher. He squinted into the darkness. Buffy and Xander followed his gaze, but didn't see anything.

"I don't know", he replied. The cloud that hung over the moon moved and the unmistakable shape of Zeitlos came into plain view. "I take that back. Xander, are you ready with the spell?"

Xander crossed his fingers. "Ready."

James took a deep breath and handed a small dagger to Annaliese. She made the sign of the cross and moved forward to engage the demon. "Zeitlos", she called out.

The all-too familiar demon turned around to face her. "Slayer?", he guessed, with an amused snarl. His yellow eyes looked her up and down. "You'd be a great asset to my little army if you weren't...well, a Slayer."

"Lucky for me, then", she whispered. Zeitlos didn't seem to want to

talk anymore. He turned his back on Annaliese and mumbled a few words in a language Buffy couldn't understand. Almost immediately, a small flicker of light appeared in front of him. It slowly grew to a circle about the size of a dinner plate. Annaliese took the opportunity to run to him. She plunged the dagger into Zeitlos' shoulder; he grunted in pain and whipped around.

"You shouldn't have done that", he told the older Slayer. With one hand, he punched her. Buffy winced. It was taking every bit of her strength to not run to help. Annaliese swung at the demon, her fist making contact with his side. He bent over slightly and she hit him with a kick to the jaw. He stepped backwards from the force of the blow. Behind him, the portal opened even further. Buffy could hear Xander begin the chant James had found in one of his spellbooks.

During the fight, James was watching Annaliese, his eyes never leaving her. Buffy could sense that he, like her, wanted to help. But this was Annaliese's job. And she was doing it well. Zeitlos tried to trip her, but she jumped out of the way and gave him another hard punch to the ribs. The demon let out a terrible snarl and bent at the waist, his horns catching Buffy's eye in the moonlight. She opened her mouth to yell to Annaliese, but Zeitlos was too quick. He ran for the Slayer, ramming into her small body with every ounce of strength he had. Buffy saw the scene as though it was in slow motion. Annaliese was lifted into the air, one horn tearing a path into her right side. But the real force was applied to her lower abdomen. She couldn't even scream.....in just a second, she had been thrown to the ground.

"Annie!!", James yelled her name. He ran to his fallen fiancée, followed by Buffy. Blood...blood was the first thing Buffy saw....pouring from a jagged gash in Annaliese's side, a trickle flowing from the corner of her mouth. It was all too much to take in. James knelt by her side. "Oh god....Annie!"

She reached for him. "James?" The blood rose in her throat; it kept her from saying anything more. In shock, Buffy looked over at Zeitlos. He seemed to be trying to open another portal, but couldn't. Buffy's gaze moved to Xander. Unfortunately, so did Zeitlos'. Realizing that Xander was probably what was keeping his new portal from opening, he tore the plank from a nearby see-saw and snarled, making a path for the boy. Xander, seeing him coming, stood up. He didn't see the tree branch that hung over him, until his head made contact with it. But he need not have panicked; Zeitlos never reached him. James, half-crazed, grabbed the dagger that Annaliese had dropped earlier in the fight and lunged for Zeitlos. He plunged it into the demon's shoulder blade. Zeitlos roared in pain and reached behind to pull the weapon out. Once it was out, he turned around and swung the plank at the same time. The heavy piece of wood hit the Watcher and he dropped, unconscious.

Buffy's shock dissipated. Zeitlos stood over the Watcher, holding the board at an angle in front of his body in satisfaction. Buffy ran to him, not stopping at the edge of the board. She ran up it in three long strides and kicked the demon directly in the face with all of her might. Zeitlos spun around and dropped beside the Watcher. Buffy fell to the ground, picked herself up and grabbed the dagger. Without hesitation, she stuck the blade deep into Zeitlos' heart. The demon twisted his body as the life drained out of him. Buffy's chest heaved

with exertion. She didn't have time to catch it though; Xander scrambled to his feet and ran over to her.

"C'mon", he said, running past her. "We don't have a lot of time."

"Xander, where are you going? We've got to help Annaliese!!" Buffy pulled on her friend's arm, gesturing wildly towards the fallen Slayer.

He didn't allow himself to be dragged back. "No, Buffy, we can't! We have to get to the portal."

"But she's going to...."

"Die. I know. Buff, she has to."

Tears welled up in Buffy's eyes. "We can't just leave her like this! She deserves a chance to live, to have her baby, marry her Watcher....dance to Frank Sinatra. And we can give her that, Xander."

Her friend shook his dark head sadly. "Buffy, if she doesn't die tonight, you won't exist tomorrow." She stopped as this sunk in. "C'mon....we have to go now. The portal is closing."

Buffy looked back at Annaliese's crumpled form. She wasn't moving at all anymore and a pool of blood had collected around her lower body. James was waking though, and Buffy knew they needed to be gone before he completely came to. Her glance returned to Annaliese. "I'm sorry...I'm so sorry", she whispered to the girl's frighteningly still body. She allowed Xander to pull her towards the portal. It had been reduced to half its original size by the time Buffy and Xander reached it. Each taking a deep breath, the two friends ran directly into the swirling light.

Someone was shaking her. "Buffy. Buffy, are you alright?" It was Giles and he sounded concerned. Buffy opened her eyes. Her Watcher's face hovered over her.

"Giles? Where am I? Where's Xander? And Zeitlos...?" She sat up, but Giles gently guided her back down.

"Xander is fine. He's right over there, resting." Giles pointed to a few feet away where Xander was lying in a dazed state. "You two had quite a hard fall."

"Zeitlos?", Buffy asked again.

Giles drew a blank. "He disappeared after you two fell."

Buffy ignored Giles' request for her to rest and sat up again. "That's right...cause we killed him in 1948."

"What?" The initial concern on Giles' face turned to confusion.

"The time portal", Buffy clarified. "We killed him in 1948....I know

we weren't supposed to alter the future, but things just got...carried away. He must have been planning to help himself in 1948, but we went through the portal instead."

Her Watcher blinked. "Killed him? 1948? Buffy, what are you talking about? You've been here, unconscious for the past five minutes."

The Slayer put a hand to her forehead. "Five minutes? But we....we were there, Giles. In 1948. We met Annaliese and James....we helped them kill Zeitlos, but...we couldn't save Annaliese." Giles' confused look didn't lift. "You saw us go through the portal...didn't you?"

"Zeitlos knocked you and Xander into what we thought was a portal. But it must have just been an...an energy field of some sort. You simply...passed through it and landed on the ground."

Buffy looked over at Xander who was sitting up and looking more coherent. "Tell him, Xander. Tell him we were there."

"It's true. We did the timewarp." Xander gingerly touched a bleeding wound on his head.

"Your head. You hit your head on a branch when Zeitlos came after you." Buffy pointed to the wound. "See! That's proof. We really were there, Giles."

But Giles was still unconvinced. "In all likelihood, Xander simply hit his head on a rock."

"We were there, I swear. Xander and I didn't have the same unconscious dream, or anything."

Giles rubbed his eyes. "It's not unheard of. You didn't disappear, Buffy. You passed through the energy field and fell onto the ground, unconscious. That's all I know."

Buffy reached into her back pocket to investigate a strange lump she felt there. The lump, she soon discovered, was Annaliese's necklace. She held up it up for her Watcher to see. "Giles, Annaliese gave me this. It's the same necklace we saw in the picture, remember? Please believe us....we didn't imagine this."

He reached for the tiny silver snowflake and examined it with a look of wonder on his face. "My god.....this is extraordinary", he whispered after a long moment.

"The portal we went through in 1948 must have just brought us back to the exact second we went through it in 1998", Buffy theorized. She swallowed a lump in her throat, remembering the long-dead Slayer. Giles handed the necklace back to her. "So...can we get out of here? I've had enough of this park."

Xander shakily stood up and offered his hand to help Buffy stand as well. "I hope so. Cause I feel like sleeping for several years. Just wake me up when I turn twenty-one. I don't want to miss that."

"Yes...I think we've done all we can here. We can iron out the details of Zeitlos' death later", Giles concluded. He took another

look around the park, then turned to his Slayer. "You've done it again. You've overcome another death prophecy, Buffy." His voice was both affectionate and proud.

But Buffy was solemn, despite the praise. "It wasn't my prophecy." Xander and Giles looked at her strangely. "'The Chosen One will again close her eyes, this time forever'", Buffy continued.

"Yeah and you're still here, Buff", Xander pointed out.

She shook her head. "It was talking about Annaliese. Now that Zeitlos is gone, she'll rest in peace forever, like she deserves to." Buffy rolled the delicate necklace between her fingers. "I could at least give her that."

.....Heaven....I'm in heaven....and my heart beats so, that I can hardly speak....

Frank Sinatra's voice poured from Buffy's boom box. She had kept the song on repeat for the past two days, much to her mother's chagrin. Somehow, the tune Annaliese had loved so much was comforting, and yet, haunting at the same time. Still, Buffy let it play on, again and again. There was a sudden, light tap on her window. Knowing it could only be one person, she crossed over and opened it.

"I was hoping I'd see you soon", Buffy smiled warmly at Angel. She motioned for him to climb through the window. "C'mon in. Oh, I guess you don't really need an invitation anymore, do you?"

"No, but it's always nice to be invited." In a second, he was standing beside her. "How are you?"

Buffy gave a little shrug. "I'm...alive."

Her boyfriend looked ashamed. "I'm sorry, Buffy. I tried to find you, but I ran into some vamps in the cemetery and..." Buffy cut him off.

"It's okay. The fight wasn't very long...at least not the fight that happened here. Anyways, it's over now." She touched the snowflake at the hollow of her throat.

Angel, searching for something to say, pointed at the necklace. "That's new. Where'd you get it?"

"A friend", Buffy whispered. "A friend gave it to me."

"Buffy...are you sure you're all right?"

She looked up at him. "Yeah...yeah, I'm okay. It's...well, it's a very long story and I promise to tell you someday. I just...don't feel like talking a lot about it right now."

The vampire before her nodded. "Your new respect for Frank Sinatra wouldn't have anything to do with this melancholy, would it?"

"Can't fool you, can I?" Buffy looked down at the floor, then back up at Angel. "This same friend...she really liked this song. It just reminds me of her."

Angel took a step towards her. "She must have been some friend."

"She was...could have been...we had a lot in common." Buffy fought back hot tears.

There was a short pause, during which the song ended and began again. Angel cleared his throat and took Buffy's hand. "It's been a very long time since I've done this....long before this song was even written in fact, but...would you dance with me, Buffy?" The young Slayer looked up at him with eyes so full of adoration and trust that, if he hadn't known better, he could have sworn his heart skipped a beat.

"I'd love to", she replied, wiping away the tears.

....Heaven....I'm in heaven....and my heart beats so, that I can hardly speak...and I seem to find the happiness I seek, when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek....

"I didn't think I could dance", Buffy commented, allowing Angel to lead her in an up-tempo waltz.

Angel kissed the tops of her fingers, intertwined with his own. "Everybody can waltz."

"I've been told that before." She smiled at the memory.

....Heaven...I'm in heaven....and the cares that hung around me through the week...seem to vanish like a gambler's lucky streak, when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek.....

"Who was the last person you waltzed with?" Buffy moved a little closer to him as she eased into the rhythm of the dance.

He thought for a second. "It doesn't matter. You're the only dancing partner I want to remember, Buffy."

...Come on and dance with me...I want my arm about you.....the charm about you will carry me through to heaven.....

Buffy rested her head against Angel's strong shoulder. "So, can we just stay like this for eternity?"

....I'm in heaven....and my heart beats so, that I can hardly speak.....

"That's what I had in mind." Cupping her chin with one hand, Angel kissed her softly.

....and I seem to find the happiness I seek....when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek.....

The End

2. Cheek to Cheek

Disclaimer: The Vampire Slayer mythology is not mine; Joss Whedon thought it up and I just think it's really neat. However, the Vampire Slayer in this story, as well as her Watcher and her foes, are creations of my brain, which Joss inspires.

>
Author's Notes: This story is a prequel of sorts to another story of mine titled, "The Happiness I Seek". If you haven't read that story or don't remember it, you might want to read it again before you read this. (You can find it in my Author Profile.) If you can't read it for some reason, this story can be read and understood fairly well without having read "Happiness..." It's kind of like Star Wars in that respect. You could watch and understand Episode I without having seen Episodes IV through VI....but you'd get more out of Episode I if you had seen the original trilogy. See?

>
Dedication: To Joseph. For everything he does and everything he is.

>
Cheek to Cheek

>by Kristen Elizabeth

>Geneva, Illinois
January 1943

>
When she first saw the strange man staring at her from across the street as she and her girlfriends headed into the movie theatre, she didn't pay too much attention to him. Even though she was just fourteen, at five foot, nine inches with shoulder length, thick brown hair curled under at the ends and a slender body that looked good in anything, even the simple calf length cotton skirt, sweater and overcoat she was wearing at the time, Annaliese Janson was used to being stared at.

>
But when they emerged from the theatre two hours later and he was still there, in practically the same position, she took immediate notice.

>
"Betty", she whispered to her best friend since grade school.

"Do you see that man staring at us?"

>
Betty swung her blond head around and searched the area Annaliese was looking towards. "What man?", she asked, a little louder than Annaliese would have liked.

>
Their other good friend, Colleen, a bouncy red-head, pointed at the person in question. "That man. And he's not staring at us; just at you, Annie. I don't think he even *sees* us."

>
Annaliese grabbed her mittened finger. "Don't point, Colleen! He might come over here!"

>
Betty looked up at the darkening sky. "He's probably some soldier who just got sent home and hasn't seen a pretty girl in ages. Ignore him; he'll get the picture."

>
"Unless he's good-looking. Then you should go introduce yourself." Colleen winked.

>
"Colleen!" Betty feigned shock. "A young lady should never, ever initiate a conversation with a stranger. My mother says...."

>
Annaliese looked back across the street, tuning out her friend. The man was still staring at her. He stood partially in the shadows formed by the doorway to the closed sweet shop. So, she wasn't able to get a very good look at him. He didn't seem to be too much older than she, however. She put him in his early twenties. And he wasn't wearing an army uniform; his suit looked rather formal for their small Chicago suburb.

>
"Annie." Betty's voice jarred her from her thoughts. "Are you

coming with us to the drugstore? We're supposed to meet Billy and the boys."

>
She shook her head. "I'm going to go home. I don't like to leave Mother alone at night much."

>
The mood sombered. It had been a year, but it still hurt them all to think about Annaliese's father. He and most of his shipmates had been killed by a German U-boat in the Mediterranean Sea. That had been the turning point in the war for Annaliese and her circle of friends. It wasn't until then that it all really hit them. Having been only twelve at the time, their lives hadn't truly been upturned when America entered the war. They had rationed butter and eggs, scrimped and pinched and bought war bonds with the rest of the country, but until Mrs. Janson recieved that letter from the War Department, Hitler and Mussolini were just people in Europe. Now, they were the monsters in their dreams. And the girls' world hadn't been the same since.

>
Colleen kicked the edge of a small snowbank with her saddle shoe. "It's okay, Annie. We'll tell Billy. He'll be mighty disappointed, but he'll understand."

>
Annaliese smiled at her friends. "Thanks. Betty, are we still playing raquetball tomorrow?"

>
Betty sighed good-naturedly. "I don't see why I agree to play against you, Annie. You always win. Sometimes I get frightened when you hit that ball so hard."

>
"Please, Betty", Annaliese pleaded. "I need to work on my backswing and you're the only one who can play."

>
Her friend nodded over her shoulder. Colleen was already walking towards the drugstore. "I'll meet you at the gymnasium. Bye Annie!!", Betty called out, running to catch up with Colleen.

>
Annaliese waved back and watched her friends until they were a good distance away. She stood on the sidewalk for another minute, as if debating what to do next. Curiosity finally overcame her and she glanced back at the spot where the man had stood. He had disappeared.

>
Unsure of whether or not that was a good thing, Annaliese adjusted the scarf around her neck and began to walk the very familiar streets back to her house. She sped up when she noticed how dark the sky had grown. No matter how boring their town was, all the papers said it was never a good idea to be out by oneself after dark. Who knew if the Germans had spies in the very Heartland of America, waiting to kidnap and hold young Americans hostage? Annaliese tended to scoff those very ridiculous notions, but even she couldn't deny that there was safety in numbers. And her numbers were on their way to the drugstore without her.

>
She was on Main Street, only two blocks from her destination when she first got the sensation she was being followed. The tiny hairs on the back of her neck rose and her breathing became very shallow. When she heard a footstep only a few feet behind her, her stomach dropped. Mustering all of her courage, she stopped walking.

>
"Who's there?", she asked. It was a struggle to keep her voice calm. There was no reply. She took a few more steps forward until she heard another noise. "I know you're there, whoever you are."

>
A second of silence followed. Then, Annaliese heard a sound. An entirely different sound. A sound she would never forget, but would grow quite accustomed to, eventually.

>
Something snarled at her.

>
It made her blood run colder than the air around her. "Oh god", she whispered, closing her eyes. What was waiting behind her in the

dark?

>
She felt something quickly approach her. Her eyes flew open. The man from across the street stood in front of her. Annaliese had no time to take it all in; the stranger grabbed her right hand and placed something in it.

>
"Use this", he told her.

>
Dazed and more than slightly confused, Annaliese looked down at the object. It was a short piece of wood, sharpened at one end. Her confusion grew. "What? What is this? Who are you?" The snarling behind her grew louder. And closer.

>
"You'll know what do with it", the man told her. She noted his accent. English. "Trust me." He grabbed her shoulders and spun her around.

>
Annaliese found herself face to face with a monster....a monster in a human body. She wanted to scream but fear had frozen her lips. The creature making the snarling noises advanced on her. She looked back down at the wooden weapon. Instinct took over her whole being.

>
With all her might, Annaliese transferred the man's weapon to her left hand, balled up her right fist and sent it hurtling straight into the creature's deformed face, just as she had seen in so many motion pictures. To her great surprise, it stumbled backwards from the blow. To her even greater surprise, her fist didn't hurt at all. It only took the creature a second to recover and come at her again, but Annaliese was ready for him. Raising her leg, she thrust it towards her opponent until it caught him square in the chest. He fell back into the snow and lay there, the wind momentarily knocked out of him.

>
"Use the stake!", the man yelled to her.

>
Annaliese hesitated before she realized what she had to do. Dropping to her knees, ignoring the cold ground, she grasped the stake with both gloved hands and raised it high above her head. With one powerful stab, she plunged it into the creature's chest. Before she could even blink, her opponent exploded into a cloud of dust.

>
She sat back on her heels and tried to catch her breath. A hand touched her shoulder.

>
"Annaliese Imogene Janson", the English man stated.

>
"My friends call me Annie", she whispered, staring at the field of dust on the snow that the creature had left. Then, she blinked.

"How do you know my name? Who are you?" She shakily stood up.

"What...what *was* that?"

>
The man put his hands in the pockets of his coat. "I'm James Wellborn....your Watcher."

>
"My what?"

>
James looked up at the sky. Snow had begun to fall again; she hadn't even noticed. "We should get inside. Somewhere warm." He held out his hand.

>
Annaliese ignored it. "No. Not until you tell me what's going on and who you really are."

>
He nodded his dark head. "If you want to do this here, fine."

There was a pause as he cleared his throat. "In every generation there is one girl, a Chosen One who will fight the forces of evil. Creatures like the one you just killed. You are she. You are the Vampire Slayer, Miss Janson."

>
A laugh rose in her throat. "You've got to be kidding me."

>
"I'm quite serious. This is your destiny. And as your Watcher, it's my job to train you and look after you. I'm sure you have a lot of questions...."

>
"You bet I have a lot of questions", Annaliese retorted. "First of all, exactly what was that thing and how did I manage to kill it?"

>
James sighed. "I just told you. You are the Vampire Slayer....it's in your power."
>
"My power", she repeated. "So that...thing was a..."

>
"Vampire, yes."
>
She nodded. "Okay....that's ridiculous, but we'll move on to the second question, which is, why me? Why do you think I'm this...this Chosen One? Are you sure you haven't got the wrong girl?"

>
"There is no mistake. The Watcher's Council doesn't make mistakes. We have been calling and training Slayers since the dawn of time." James moved closer to her. "Surely you must know your strength. I didn't have to tell you how to kill that vampire; you just knew. It's in your blood, has been since you were born. But only now is it your time."
>
"What do you mean?" A cold ball of fear formed in her stomach.

>
"The previous Slayer was killed three days ago. When one Slayer dies, the next is called. It's your responsibility now. You are the only person who can fight the world's evil."
>
Annaliese swallowed a lump in her throat. "I don't want this! Find yourself another Chosen One." She made a motion to run away, but James caught her arm.
>
"Do you think this is a game, Miss Janson? We are talking about things that have been going on for centuries. You are part of this whether you like it or not." There was anger in his handsome features.
>
She forcibly shook him off. "How old was your last Slayer?"

>
"I don't see how that...."
>
"How old was she??"
>
James hesitated. "Sixteen."
>
Annaliese's breath came in rapid pants. "Sixteen. She was sixteen. I'm fourteen years old!! And you want me to do the same things she did? The things that got her killed? You can forget about it!!" Her eyes narrowed. "Count me out."
>
"I starting to wish I could. But you will accept your destiny, Miss Janson. Or you'll die before you even reach fifteen." He held out a piece of paper. "When you come to your senses, I'm at this address." He waited until she reluctantly took the paper from his hand. "Have a pleasant evening."
>
Annaliese listened as the crunching of footsteps in the snow grew more distant. "Wait!", she eventually called out. The footsteps stopped. Slowly, she approached the strange man. "Are there a lot of those...things? Those vampires?", she asked, gesturing to the dust.

>
"Yes", was his simple reply. "Thousands all over the world."

>
"And I'm the only one who can fight them?"
>
James walked back to her. "You are the Slayer. The one and only."
>
Annaliese nodded. "So...what do we do now?"
>
"What exactly do you mean?"
>
She shrugged her small shoulders. "You said you were supposed to train me. I don't know anything about this. How does a Slayer train?"
>
"Well...it's complicated...", James began.

>
"Why complicated? Do I have to take Chosen One classes or something? I hope not, because I'm struggling to pass Biology as it is. If this...slaying distracts from my schoolwork, my mother is going to be very..."

>
"You can't stay on at your school, Miss Janson."

>
Annaliese paused in mid-sentence. "Excuse me?"

>
James sniffed and looked up at the sky again. It seemed to be a nervous habit of his. "The Slayer....well, the Slayer can not live in the normal world. She is seperate. Distinct. Her destiny....her duties do not lend themselves to a normal lifestyle." He paused. "Can you understand that?"

>
The look she gave him was dumfounded. It took her several minutes to even regain the capacity to form words in order to reply. "You...you're saying...what? That I'm supposed to...drop off the face of the planet?" She raised her voice; anger had begun to set in. What he was telling her...it was unacceptable. "This is....this is ridiculous!"

>
"It's not ridiculous, Miss Janson. It's the way things have been done since the dawn of time."

>
"Maybe your Council needs a new way to do things."

>
James stifled a laugh. "Twenty minutes as a Slayer and she's questioning Council protocol", he announced to the emptiness around them.

>
"I'll question anyone who wants to change my life."

>
"Wake up, little girl. Your life has already changed. It will never be the same again." Annaliese's eyes watered at his harsh tone. She bit her lip and looked down at the snow, unable to think of a comeback. Seeing her hurt, James instantly felt terrible. "Miss Janson, I...I do apologize. That was...uncalled for."

>
Annaliese wiped her cheek with the back of her mitten. "I just don't understand what you want from me." She looked up at him with all the innocence of a child. And for a moment, he could have sworn he could see through to her very soul. Her look held nothing back. "Do you want to take me away from my friends? From my mother?"

>
"I'm sorry", he whispered. "It's your destiny." Out of instinct, he reached out to touch her shoulder

>
"How much do you know about me, Mr. James Wellborn, English Watcher? Huh?" She jerked her body away from him. "Do you know that my father died in the war? Do realize that I am the only person my mother has left in the world?"

>
James shoved his hands in his pockets. "I am aware of..."

>
"You are aware of nothing! Nothing!!", Annaliese screamed. A long moment passed after her outburst. She approached him; the muscles in her slender frame were so taut that she shook. "I want nothing to do with this. Leave me alone."

>
He grabbed her arm to keep her from running off. "Have you ever seen a dead body, Miss Janson?" She didn't answer. "Have you ever seen anyone killed right before your very eyes? And have you ever had to stand there, not able to do a bloody thing about it? No. You never will. Because you're able to do something about it. And you're the only one who can." He released her. "You're the only one."

>
They faced each other for seemed like half of forever. The only movement in the air was their breath, swirling visible in the darkness whenever they exhaled. "I'm going home", Annaliese finally

said. "And I'm going to try to forget that this..." She swung her arms in wide gesture. "...ever happened."
>
"You know where I'll be", James called to her retreating figure.

>
Annaliese broke into a run as soon as she was sure he couldn't see her anymore. She couldn't even remember running to her house, but soon she was there. She stood on her porch for a long time, catching her breath. The snow had started to fall again; she could actually see her footsteps on the sidewalk being blanketed with a fresh sheet of white powder. When they were completely covered, she let herself into the house.

>
Warmth enveloped her shivering body. It was the kind of warmth one can only ever find at home. The radio was on; Annaliese could hear it playing in the living room. Shrugging out of her coat, she walked into the room. In the big rocking chair in the corner, her mother slept, not stirring even when Annaliese's saddle shoes hit a creak in the wood floor. A saxophone wailed a tune through the radio, upbeat and happy. Almost a compensation for the war news that would be coming on any minute. Annaliese turned it off.

>
Still holding her coat, Annaliese walked over to the fireplace. The embers were very low, but she decided not to put another log on. Instead, she picked up a framed photograph from the mantle. Her father's laughing blue eyes looked back at her. Her mother stood at his side, looking up with pure love in her eyes at the child who sat on her husband's shoulders. Annaliese ran her finger over the image of herself at five years old. *It's in your blood, has been since you were born*. She set the picture back in its place.

>
A heavy weight settled into her chest as she took the stairs up to her bedroom. Once inside the tiny room that had been her sanctuary for fourteen years, Annaliese threw her coat and scarf onto the bed and peeled off her mittens. Outside, the snow continued to fall. Inside, her tears began to fall. Annaliese dropped to her knees beside her bed as sobs racked her small frame. Through the cloud of tears, she could see faces. Betty, Colleen, Billy. Her mother, her father....even James. And then, the creature...the vampire. *Are there a lot of those things? Those vampires?....Yes. Thousands all over the world.* Her fist pounded the mattress.

>
When she regained composure, she slowly rose to her feet, ignoring her wet cheeks. Taking a seat at her desk, she withdrew her father's old fountain pen and a single piece of paper from her drawer. She had a letter to write. *Dear Ma....*

>
It turned out to be the hardest letter she would ever compose.

>

>
James answered the door on the second knock.

>
"I want to be the Slayer", Annaliese blurted out before he could say anything. "I'm accepting my destiny."

>
His face remained expressionless. "Your life will never be the same."

>
"I know. But I don't believe it would be even if I stayed here and did nothing."

>
Her Watcher nodded. "We'll leave in the morning, then."

>
"Where are we going?"

>
James took her suitcase from her hand. "Wherever we're needed, Miss Janson."

>
"My friends called me Annie."

>

>
New York City

>May 1945

>"He's behind you!"

>Annaliese spun around just in time to see the vampire running towards her. She caught him in the stomach with the heel of her shoe. He doubled over, giving her time to deliver a powerful upper cut to his jaw. His body straightened and his head snapped back, leaving his chest exposed. Without wasting any time, Annaliese plunged her stake directly into his heart and stood back to watch as the vampire's body crumbled in dust. The wind scattered the remains across Central Park.

>A wide grin on her lips, Annaliese turned back around. "Not bad, eh? Although it was a shame to dust that uniform. We should have stripped it off of him and sent it to the troops."

>James picked himself up off the grass. "I suppose you're going to make us eat less butter this week to make up for it", he replied, dryly.

>"Don't be unpatriotic just because he knocked you down, James."

>"I don't have to be patriotic; I'm not American, remember?" James straightened his suit coat and readjusted his glasses.

>Annaliese returned her stake to her sweater's pocket. "All right, how about grateful then? Hitler would be residing in Buckingham Palace right now if it weren't for my country."

>"A fact you feel the need to remind me of whenever I bring the subject up."

>"I don't need you to bring the subject up. I can remind you of that anytime." She winked.

>What annoyance he had felt melted away. He laughed. "You win, Miss America."

>There was a comfortable pause. Annaliese noticed a few blades of grass on his shoulder. Without thinking, she reached out.

"You..um...have some grass on you." She brushed them off the tweed.

>"Oh...yes. Thanks...thanks."

>"So...what's next?", Annaliese asked, awkwardly.

>James cleared his throat. "Should we...uh...walk some more? See if we can get one more tonight?"

>Annaliese nodded. "Sure. Why not?"

>They were quiet for a few minutes as they walked through Central Park. "So", James broke the silence. "Someone has a birthday coming up."

>"Oh no." Annaliese put a hand to her forehead. "I was hoping you would forget."

>"It will be your sixteenth birthday", James replied. "Isn't that supposed to be the biggest one of a young girl's life?"

>"I'm not a...." Annaliese paused. "It's just a birthday, James. No big deal."

>"I think it's quite a big deal. It at least warrants a present. Is there anything you would like to commemorate the day?"

>Annaliese smiled at his words. So many big words for one simple thought. Her smile fell. "I'd like to see my mother", she said softly.

>James slowed down. "Your mother."

>"That just came out. I didn't...." She paused. "Let's just forget it, all right?"

>He held up his hand. "No...you have a valid wish. And I think we need to talk about it."

>"I don't think so, no", Annaliese brushed it off with a shake of her brown hair. "My God...is it possible for a city to be any hotter?"

>James decided to let the birthday subject drop as well. "I hear this is typical for New York in May."

>"This is one of those times you wish you could just wear a loincloth", she sighed. "Like those pictures you see in the newspapers from the South Pacific."

>Her Watcher cleared his throat. "Um...yes. Indeed."

>"Of course, I suppose one could just wear a bathing suit. Did you see..." She was interrupted by a distant scream. "Let's go!!", she yelled, taking off into a run.

>James followed, pushing himself to keep up with his Slayer. Her path led them through a wooded area of the park. When they burst through to the street, they both stopped abruptly, Annaliese in full fighting stance. But what they saw utterly confused them.

>Up and down the row of buildings, there were people, coming out of apartments and clubs. Taxis were stopping in the middle of the street, their passengers climbing out through the windows. And everyone was yelling. Their cries of joy filled the air.

>"What in the world is going on?", James wondered aloud. A man ran past them, screaming, yet a wide smile was plastered on his face. James caught his sleeve. "Sir, can you tell us what at this is for?"

>The man looked at them at strangely. "Haven't you heard?"

>"Evidently not", Annaliese replied. "Or else we wouldn't be asking."

>"It's over!!", the man shouted happily. "The Germans surrendered! The war is over!!"

>James let go of the man's sleeve. "The war is...over?" The man didn't reply; he was already halfway down the block.

>Annaliese looked up at her Watcher. Her eyes were wide; the corners of her lips were on a steady rise. "James....it's over", she whispered. Then, she screamed. "It's all over!!!"

>Her joy spread to her Watcher. James threw his head back and laughed. "We won!! We won!!", he cried to the night sky. Caught in the moment, he grabbed Annaliese by the waist and swung her around.

>It was a moment neither of them would ever forget. There was no formality between them as his hands grasped her waist. For the few seconds her feet were off the ground, Annaliese felt as though she were weightless, held down by nothing...completely content in his arms. Even after he set her down, they remained close for a long minute. Their breath came in rapid pants, not entirely from the exertion of victory.

>James broke the moment, put the boundaries of formality back up again. He let go of her waist and stepped back. "I can't believe it's over...just like that. And your president didn't get to see it."

>Annaliese's head spun, but she managed to nod sadly. "Yeah....I'm sure Mr. Roosevelt is looking down on us though." She thought for a second. "But James....the man said Germany surrendered. He didn't say anything about the Japanese." She blinked and smiled. "So, I'm still going to make you stick to that butter ration. For the guys in the Pacific."

>"Ah, but now that there's a cease-fire in Europe, traveling there will be safe again. We can go to England." James closed his eyes and smiled. "I can go home."

>*****

>London
December 1946

>
A cup of tea in her hand, Annaliese stepped out onto her balcony and looked down at the street below her. Few people were out and about; the cold Christmas Eve snowfall and subsequent slush were keeping most everyone in Chelsea indoors. But the weather didn't bother Annaliese. This was bathing suit weather compared to the Illinois winters she had grown up with. Thinking of Chicago brought an instant wave of melancholy, welling up inside of her until it had taken over completely. She was used to it, almost expected it. Every holiday was tough on her. There were just far too many memories associated with them, especially Christmas.

>
She glanced back into the flat she had been sharing with James since January, almost a year. The brightly colored lights of the tiny Christmas tree she had insisted on setting up the first weekend of December glowed cheerily. Probably the cheeriest thing she had seen since they moved to England. Which wasn't to say it depressed her. But the war...it had taken such a toll on James' country. The evidence of that was in every pile of ruins that had been a home or a business before a German bomb landed on it, but was now nothing more than an excellent hideout for a nest of vampires.

>
And there were many nests. So many...a never-ending supply of the creatures who seemed to thrive in a post-war society. And they were everywhere; they left no section of London uninhabited. From Kensington to Isling, she and James had found and dusted vampires in every area of the city. But, like any bad thing, vampires had an endless population count.

>
She sipped her tea and looked down at the street once more. A block away, she could just make out James, returning home from wherever he went on his solitary walks. An involuntary smile played on her lips as she watched him come closer. His coat was unbuttoned, his dark hair was tousled from the wind and he only had one mitten on. Sometimes she thought she would go crazy having to watch her Watcher. Other times, all she wanted to do was take care of him forever. But that was a thought she kept buried deep inside heart, never to see the light of day.

>
When James disappeared from her sight, having gone inside their building, she headed back into the warmth of the flat. She closed the French doors behind her, but left the curtains open to let in what little daylight managed to peek through the clouds. Their recently acquired radio played Frank Sinatra in the background; she quickly flipped the bands until she found the BBC. James would want to listen to the news.

>
A moment later she could hear James' key slide into the lock. He let himself in quietly; he held onto a strange package that hadn't been in his hands on the street. He looked up from it, surprised to see her standing in the middle of the room.

>
"Annaliese...you're awake."

>
She smiled; no matter how much she tried to get him to relax, he always used her full, formal name. "I couldn't sleep. I thought I heard carolers on the street, but it was just Mrs. Higgins' radio." She pointed to the right, indicating the little old woman who lived next door.

>
James set the package down in an armchair and took off his coat and mitten. "Are you sure you'll be up to par tonight? You did stay up until dawn, remember."

>
"I'll be fine, James." Annaliese picked up the parcel. "What's this?"

>
He shrugged as he headed into the kitchen to fix a cup of tea. "I'm not sure; it was in the mailbox. Could be something from the

Council, I suppose."

>
Annaliese turned the package over in her hands. "It's addressed to you." She grinned with child-like impishness. "Can I open it?" Her Watcher gave her the go-ahead with a raise of his tea cup. Eagerly, she ripped a long gash in the brown paper with one red-painted nail. Her fingers touched leather. Puzzled, she withdrew a small, bound book. A cream colored envelope sat underneath it. "You got a book", she announced.

>
James stopped dunking his tea bag up and down and looked at her. "A book?"

>
"Yeah....and there's a letter." She opened the envelope and cleared her throat. "'Dear Mr. Wellborn...we apologize that this is so late in coming. Mr. Payne has only just sent it to us.'" She stopped. "Who's Mr. Payne?"

>
James' face voice was quiet. "The Watcher before me." He turned off the radio. "Go on."

>
Annaliese swallowed before continuing. "'He has given us his journal and now we are handing it to you. Use it to your advantage.'" She looked up. "It's not signed."

>
"They never sign anything", James said, walking over to her. He took the journal from her. Opening it, he flipped until he found the last few entries. Several long minutes passed as he read.

>
"James?", Annaliese asked after awhile. "What's wrong?"

>
"I had begun to fear this", he said. Slowly, he sat down in the armchair, still holding the journal open before him. "And now...it's confirmed."

>
She knelt next to the chair. "Talk to me, James. Is there something bad coming? A demon? The end of the world?"

>
James ran a hand through his thick hank of brown hair. "How much have you been listening to the news?" Before she could answer, he continued. "Have you been hearing anything about Hitler's work camps? His final solution for the Jewish people?"

>
Annaliese's forehead crinkled. "Wartime propaganda, James. Everyone knows that. No one can do that....kill as many people as they say were killed, without the entire world knowing about it. That's just common sense."

>
"No. It's not, Annie. It's really, really not." James' eyes were red-rimmed.

>
"You called me 'Annie'", she whispered. "What is going on?"

>
James' hands enfolded her small ones. "Mr. Payne's diary doesn't end in 1943, the year you were called. It ends in 1942, the year...." He paused, hanging his head momentarily. "The year his Slayer was taken away by the Nazis."

>
"Taken away....?"

>
His grip tightened. "Her name was Joella. She was fifteen years old. She was a German Jew. They took her one night...and he never saw her again. Never heard anything from her or about her until a year later when...you were called."

>
Annaliese's face paled. "I don't...I don't understand..."

>
"They put her in one of those camps, Annie! Have you seen the pictures from your American troops? Those weren't work camps; they were death camps. And they killed her. They killed her because she was Jewish." To her horror, tears fell from her Watcher's eyes.

>
She pulled her hands away with one solid jerk. "It's all true? All those rumors.....? No. No. No", she repeated. Her feet began to

pace the room frantically. "No. Slayers don't get killed by human beings. Slayers get bitten or...or beaten or sucked into Hell! I don't believe this."

>
"You have to believe it, Annie. It's..."

>
"Why do you always do that?!", she screamed. "Why do you always tell me what I have to do?"

>
He looked down at the floor. "Because I'm your...."

>
"Because you're my Watcher? Because some of your stuffy countrymen tell you to train me? Well what are you training me for, James?"

>
"What...?"

>
"What the hell are you training me for? So I can save the world? Why should I bother?"

>
James stood up. "How can you even ask that?"

>
"How can I not? I have been a Slayer for three years, James. Out almost every night for three years. And I've done a good job, haven't I? I've killed vampires and even a handful of demons. But you know what I say to that? Big deal."

>
"It's a very big deal."

>
Annaliese laughed harshly, her back to him. "Oh is it? Is it a big deal, James? Is it a big fucking deal?! Why do you think that??"

>
"Because you've saved lives."

>
"I've saved lives? I've saved lives." She turned around. "While I've been risking my life to kill a handful of vampires, a human being...a single, insignificant human being with absolutely no supernatural power whatsoever, killed thousands and thousands of people right under our noses!!" Her words echoed around the walls. She shook with anger and tears. "Why did I bother, James? And how...." Her voice cracked. "How can I go on knowing that...I can never save enough people to make up for what he did?"

>
"Oh, Annie." James caught her body before it slumped to the floor under the weight of her sobs.

>
Her face pressed into his shirt collar, wetting it in seconds.

"They killed her, James. I am what I am because they killed that poor girl."

>
He rocked her gently. "Shhh...."

>
"And....the worst part is..." She lifted her head and looked into his eyes. "I couldn't have done anything about it. You said...you said that I would never have to feel this way. You said I'd always be able to save people."

>
"I know....I'm sorry." He stroked her hair. "I'm so sorry."

>
James held her tight, his strong arms wrapped around her slender body. With her face against his shoulder, he could smell her, a scent that had haunted so many of his dreams. The only way he could find to describe it was Early Grey tea. Sweet and familiar with a dash of spice and tart. She was so fragile as they sat their on the floor, holding on to each for comfort...both trying to make sense of something that would never make sense to the world.

>
But, he wanted to make sense of it for her; he was her Watcher, after all. Wasn't that supposed to be his job? She was still just a child, seventeen and a few months. *No,* he thought. *She's a woman now.* He had known her for three years, been her constant companion, her only friend and guardian in the world. His fingers touched her silky hair again. In those three years, she had blossomed right before his eyes from an untrained child to a strong girl to a lovely woman. He suddenly felt so very lucky that he had gotten to see that. And also, so very frightened that at any moment, something...or

someone could take it all away from him.

>
His lips found her forehead and kissed it gently. Her tears were slowing, but she didn't try to end the embrace. "Annie", he whispered. "You have done so much good. Saved so many lives." He kissed her forehead again. "You saved mine."

>
She pulled back a little. "What?"

>
He looked down at the floor. "Before I met you, my life....well, I had nothing, Annie. No one. I was twenty-two years old and suddenly responsible for a little American girl." He smiled, his eyes still downcast. "I wasn't too happy about it. I didn't want to be a Watcher ,but I had been taught by my father and my grandfather that destiny is inescapable. So...I went along, played my part. But for a long time, I resented it. And I resented you."

>
Annaliese let her arms drop from around him. "And now...?"

>
"Now..." Another long moment passed before he looked back up. Into her eyes. "All I want...is to be with you forever. You gave me something, Annie. A reason to..." He looked up at the ceiling before a tear could fall. "You gave me a reason to live."

>
"Oh, James."

>
"Annie, I love you. I have loved you so much for so long. And I'm probably risking our relationship....but I had to tell you. Because I couldn't bear it if anything ever took you away from me."

>
"James", she repeated. Her cool hand touched his cheek, slid through through his hair; the pad of her thumb caressed his temple. "I know how you feel."

>
"You do?"

>
She nodded. "I love you too."

>
The weight of their declarations hung in the air between them. The moment was like a rich dessert, delicious and decadent, but leaving a craving that would need to be fulfilled. Annaliese took the first step; she closed her eyes and kissed her Watcher.

>
She tasted exactly as he had imagined she would. Cinnamon. His tongue met hers in spiced kiss after another. With one hand, he removed his glasses. The other pulled her waist closer to him. They sat on the floor, body, mind and soul intertwined.

>
But he found himself pushing back. "Annie...I don't know if we should be doing...this."

>
"James." She lightly ran her tongue over his lips. "I don't want you to think like my Watcher right now. I want you to think like a man who loves me."

>
He could think of no reply but to kiss her again. Her small hands slid from their locked position behind his neck, down to his chest; her fingers slowly worked the top button of his shirt loose, then proceeded to the next and the next. His lips pressed harder against hers when she touched his bare skin. She delicately explored his well-sculpted chest, the first man's body she had ever been in contact with. That realization of her complete innocence almost made him stop again. But then, those red-tipped fingers trailed down to his stomach muscles and any coherent thought was completely wiped away.

>
Gently, he cupped the back of her head with his own hand and slowly lowered back against the wooden floor. He lifted his face from hers and looked down at her. She looked back up at him, with no trace of fear or hesitancy...just pure trust and love. James planted little kisses on her forehead and eyelids and finally, on her lips.

>
"Are you ready for this?", he asked, tucking a lock of her hair behind her ear.

>
She lifted her head and kissed him. "I've been ready."

>
Neither Slayer nor Watcher even heard the carolers outside.

>
Have yourself a merry little Christmas....let your heart be light....from now on our troubles will be out of sight....

>

>
The darkness woke Annaliese up, accustomed as she was to its presence. The floor was hard against her bare back, even through the blanket James had gotten from his bedroom. Turning her head to the right, she looked across the living room to the French doors. The individual squares of glass were frosted in infinitesimal patterns of white.

>
"Jack Frost has been by", she whispered to herself.

>
Next to her, James stirred. She turned back onto her side and pulled her body closer to his warmth; her cheek rested on his arm. Still half asleep, his hand slid under her neck and around her bare shoulder until she was pressed against his chest, even closer to him than before. She felt his lips touch her hairline.

>
"Are you awake?", she asked, softly.

>
"I'm not sure", he murmured into her hair. "I was pretty convinced I was dreaming."

>
"You dream about me?"

>
He nodded. "Waking up next to you has been one of my better dreams for a long time."

>
Annaliese propped herself up on one elbow and looked down at her Watcher. His eyes were still closed. "I love you."

>
James smiled and opened his eyes. "Now I know I'm dreaming."

>
"So.." She ran her hand up and over his chest. "If this is a dream, what happens next?"

>
"Well...actually....this is the part when I wake up. Then I would lie there in bed...knowing that you were sleeping just a room away. And that physically...only a wall seperated us. But emotionally...." James stopped.

>
"Hey", Annaliese said. "There's no wall, physical or emotional, that can seperate us anymore. I promise. You'll never wake up alone again." He touched her cheek lovingly before pulling her back to his body. There was a moment of contented silence. Then, Annaliese thought of something. "James?"

>
"Hmm?"

>
"When did you first know that....that you loved me?"

>
He thought for a second and then chuckled. "Honestly, the first day I met you."

>
"But you said you didn't want to have anything to do with me then."

>
"Ah", he held up one finger to correct her. "Doesn't mean I couldn't find you attractive. From the minute you opened your mouth....well, you didn't talk like a fourteen year old. That got me, right away." A chuckle. "And I've been had ever since." He hesitated. "So...when did you know that you...um...loved me?"

>
She smiled. "Do you remember that night in Phildelphia? It was so cold and we were chasing after that Kaslar demon? I slid on a patch of ice and fell flat on my face."

>
"I remember that."

>
"I knew I loved you when you stopped to make sure I was all right. You didn't care as much about the demon as you did about me. You've always taken care of me, James. You've been my mother, my

father, my teacher, my coach and my best friend all in one. And now...."

>
"Now something new entirely", he finished. "And you think we're ready for this?"

>
She sat up. "Don't you?"

>
"Yeah....I do." He sat up as well.

>
Annaliese smiled again and looked back over her shoulder. It still snowed outside; the white stood out against the dark sky. "It's officially Christmas, James", she announced. "Merry Christmas."

>
He gave her a soft kiss. "Merry Christmas, Annie."

>
"Oh!", she cried. "I never picked up your present! The book shop had to order it and I completely forgot to go get it! I'm so sorry, James."

>
Her Watcher laughed and put his index finger over her lips. "I don't need a present to make this the best Christmas ever." Seeing she was still disappointed in herself, he replaced his finger with his lips. "If it makes you feel better, we don't exchange presents here until the day after Christmas."

>
Annaliese's eyes twinkled again. "Good." She cleared her throat and looked innocent. "Any hints as to what *I* might be opening tomorrow morning?"

>
James kissed the peaches and cream skin of her shoulder. "I can tell you right now, if you'd like." She nodded eagerly. "All right. Your present is....." He paused dramatically. "Airplane tickets."

>
"Airplane tickets? Where are we going?"

>
He looked into her eyes. "I'm taking you home to Chicago."

>
"Oh!" Delight shone from her face. "America! Really?"

>
"Really. And it's for good this time. The Council has been identifying a few hot spots of supernatural activity in America. We're closer than ever to finding the Hellmouth."

>
Her happy expression fell a little. "Then, it's just a business thing?"

>
James picked up on her change of mood. "I wish there was a way around it, Annie. But besides the Hellmouth, the Council has also been tracking a new demon for awhile. They believe his next stop will be America. With any luck, he might lead us to the Hellmouth."

>
Annaliese forced a smile to her lips. "So...we'll go to America. I can't wait."

>
"You're pleased then? I know how much you've missed your home, Annie."

>
She played with a frayed edge of the blanket. "It's gotten better. I'm a lot stronger than I look, James. You know that."

>
James cupped her face with his hands and kissed her again. "Yes, I do." He pulled her to his body and began loving her all over again.

>

>
Chicago

>December 1947

>"Name?"

>"Zeitlos."

>"Species?"

>"Unidentified, possibly a new one altogether."

>"What do we know about him?"

>"According to the Council, he has the ability to time-travel. He's pretty big, might have horns and...." Annaliese paused. "Hey! We're out of milk."

>James looked up from his books. "What?"

>His Slayer held up the empty bottle. "No more milk." She shut the icebox. "I can't make your pudding thing without milk."

>"I think your pudding problems will extend beyond milk", James replied. He stood and walked up behind her. "What are these for?" He pointed over her shoulder to a bag of fruit on the counter.

>"They're plums."

>"And you bought them because.....?"

>Annaliese craned her neck to give him a look. "You told me you wanted Plum Pudding."

>James threw his head back with laughter. "Oh sweetheart...I appreciate the effort, but you don't have to do this."

>"Are you sure? You said it was the one thing you missed about England." She brushed a strand of hair out of her eyes. He nodded. "Okay. I have to say, I'm kind of relieved. The idea of putting plums into a pudding.....it was making me very sick to my stomach."

>His brow furrowed. "You were nauseated this morning, too....are you all right?"

>"I'm fine, James. I'm more worried about this dinner."

>James ran a hand down the length of her hair, enjoying the feel of it against his palm. "Don't worry. Why don't we just have chocolate cake instead?"

>"Well...." Annaliese pouted. "I'm going to need milk for that, too."

>Her Watcher wrapped his arms around her and kissed the nape of her neck. "We could just skip dessert altogether...."

>She smiled and turned her head to give him a lopsided kiss. "After patrol."

>"Patrol", James said, as though he had forgotten. "Yes...we're getting very sidetracked." He let go of Annaliese and headed back to his books. "Where were we?"

>Annaliese took a plum out of the bag and bit into it. "Zeitlos. You know...the details, how we're going to track him."

>"Yes...." He flipped through a few papers. "In addition to the notion of time travel, Zeitlos, like many demons, needs a large amount of salt in his diet. The Council feels he'll ultimately head for the ocean."

>"Time travel", Annaliese mused. "If you could go back to any point in history, where would you go?"

>James took off his glasses. "The Roman Senate, March 15.....44 years B.C."

>"Um....", Annaliese thought back to their studies. "Ah!! Julius Ceasar's assassination!" James nodded. "Well, that's not very romantic. I'd want to go back to the Middle Ages...or the Confederate South." Her lover gave her a questioning look. "The dresses."

>He chuckled. "All right...all this aside, we must figure out what Zeitlos' next move will be." He looked out the window of their small rented house. "But not right now. The sun's down."

>Annaliese pulled at the strings of her apron and tossed it onto the counter. "I'll get the weapons."

>*****

>The park was quiet except for the crunching of snow beneath their feet. Annaliese walked just ahead of James, a stake discreetly concealed in her hand. "Do you see anything?", she asked,

quietly.

>James fingered a small object in his pants pocket. "Um...no...no, I don't." He looked up at the dark sky. "Annie..", he began.

>She stopped and turned around. "Yeah?"

>He took a deep breath and held it in for a moment. "Nothing", he finally said, letting the breath go, heavily. "Nothing....let's keep going."

>They walked a little further. A cold wind blew over them; Annaliese tucked her hands under her armpits for warmth. "See, this is what true Christmas Eve weather should be. None of that London slush you like so much." She winked at him.

>James smiled nervously. "Yes...yes." He cleared his throat.

>"James, is something wrong?" Annaliese stopped walking and faced him. "You're acting sort of..well, strange."

>He hesitated. "Annie..." A pause. "Annie...you and I..." He stopped.

>"Yes?"

>With shaking hands, James reached back into his pocket, pulling out a small, velvet box. "Annaliese, I love you more than anything or anyone in the world. Would you consider doing me the honor of becoming....my wife?"

>Annaliese's mittened hand went to her mouth; the stake fell to the snow. "Oh my God....James?"

>James opened the box; the glint of silver caught the moonlight. "It's not a lot...not a ring, anyways. But when I saw it, I had to get it for you. I promise you a ring as soon as I can get one."

>She took off her right mitten and reached for the necklace that lay nestled in black velvet. "Oh James....it's perfect." Tears came to her eyes. "A snowflake."

>He gave a sheepish grin. "Well, it seems like everything important in our relationship has happened while it's snowing. When we first met, when we first realized we were in love....the first time we were together." James unclasped the necklace and put it around her neck. "And...I hope....tonight." He paused as he finished reclasping it. "So...?"

>"So?" Then, she realized. "Oh! Yes! Of course!" She laughed and wiped under her eyes. "I would love to marry you." She closed her eyes and leaned in for a kiss, but her lips never made it to his. There was a loud noise from the snow-covered bushes. She opened her eyes. "Hold that thought."

>Annaliese picked up her stake and headed towards the source of the noise. Before she was halfway there, a large dark figure jumped out at her. As it came into the moonlight, she could make out two twisted horns atop its huge demonic head. "Zeitlos", she whispered. She took a fighting stance.

>The demon didn't seem to take any notice of her. As it ran past her, Annaliese swung her arm, attempting to land a good punch. Zeitlos simply extended his own arm and knocked her to the ground, continuing on his way. Annaliese hit the snow hard and lay there for a second, waiting for the world to stop spinning. She felt James grab her hand.

>"Annie...are you hurt?" His voice was worried.

>She struggled to sit up. "He brushed me off like a fly, James." A pain shot through her abdomen, but she ignored it.

>James helped her to her feet. "It was definitely Zeitlos. Fits the Council description, anyways." He looked off in the distance, where Zeitlos had disappeared. "Well, something good can come out of this; now we know exactly what we're tracking."

>Annaliese rubbed her lower stomach. "Yeah...wonderful. I can't wait to come up against that thing again."

>"You're quite sure you're all right, Annie?"

>"I'll survive." She looked down at the snow, trying to spot her stake. Instead of the weapon, she noticed a packet of papers against the white powder. She bent down and picked it up before it could get too wet. "Look at this."

>James took it from her and squinted at the bound bundle in the moonlight. "It looks like a lot of newspaper articles. It was on top of the snow, not under it?" Annaliese nodded tightly. "Zeitlos must have dropped it. I'll look over it later."

>"Okay", Annaliese replied, before taking in a sharp breath as another pain threaded from her abdomen.

>"Are you sure you're all right, Annie?"

>"Yeah...I'm fine." She smiled and looped her arms around his neck. The nagging pain was pushed to the farthest part of her mind. "I believe that we were interrupted, weren't we?"

>James closed his own arms around her waist. "Very rudely, I might add. I think you were just about to do this." He kissed her long and deep.

>"That's our first engagement kiss", Annaliese breathed, a minute later. There was a pause. "What do we do now?"

>He laughed. "You always have to know what's next."

>"I'm inquisitive. That's why you love me." She kissed him again.

>"One of many reasons. But to answer your question...." He lightly slapped her backside with the packet of papers. "We go where Zeitlos leads us."

>Annaliese rested her cheek against the tweed of James' suit. "I hope he leads us somewhere nice."

>*****

>Sunnydale, California
February 10, 1948
>
"Annie! Look at that."
>
Annaliese swung her head to the right to see a large butterfly skirt across the park. She smiled just as a flashbulb went off.

>
"James?" She closed her eyes, but still saw stars dancing before her.
>
He grinned and held up his new camera. "This thing is amazing. Canon, JII, 35 mm....you just put the film in, close it up and you're all ready!"
>
Annaliese laughed and played with her necklace. "You're like a child with a new toy. How many more pictures could you possibly take of me?"
>
"Many more if you keep looking this beautiful." James raised the camera to his eye. "Smile!" He snapped another photo of her.

>
She put her hands on her hips, good-naturedly. "I think the Council intended your toy to be used in photographing and recording whatever nasty creatures we find out here, not to take pictures of your fiancée."
>
"Oh, but I've got enough film to do both." He approached her and gave her a light kiss. "Let's go get some lunch; I'm starving."

>
She put her hand in his as they began to walk. "I was hoping you would suggest that. You know what I'm dying for? Split pea soup."

>
"Annie, you hate pea soup."
>
"I know....but I really want some."
>
James chuckled. "All right....pea soup it is. But you can't ever

complain about my cooking again after you eat it."

>
She shook her head. "I promise." They started down one sun-kissed street towards Sunnydale's downtown area. Annaliese looked up at the blue sky. It was picture perfect; a dramatic change from the frozen Chicago they had taken a train out of three weeks earlier.

>
The sound of many high-pitched voices reached her ears. Down the street, groups of teenagers poured out of a large building. As they came closer to it, Annaliese could see the sign over the main entrance. Sunnydale High School.

>
Her attention was naturally drawn to what the girls were wearing. Skirts were longer and fuller, she could see. Suddenly, she felt quite dowdy in her khaki skirt that ended just below her knees, a leftover from the scrimping and pinching war days. She made a mental note to do some serious shopping when they returned to Chicago.

>
Someone bumped into her. "Oh, I'm sorry ma'am", a tall boy apologized. It took Annaliese a moment to realize...he was talking to her. Before she could reply, he had moved off with his friends.

>
For the first time in the four years since she had left Geneva, Annaliese felt truly sorry for herself. The kids around her....they were all her age, but she might as well have been ten years older. They had no responsibilities greater than schoolwork and their Saturday night dates. And for a brief moment, Annaliese envied them. Regret washed over her like an unwanted summer rain. *I should have that. I should be that carefree, that unattached. They have everything I never got to have. Why can't I have all of that?*

>
Just then, James squeezed her hand. She looked up at his familiar face. His chiseled chin, clean shaven cheeks, dark eyes and hair, glasses... She smiled and all regret dissipated. *I have him. I don't need all of that.*

>
They walked on until they found a lunch counter.

>

>
February 13, 1948

>
The dampness of very early morning air woke Annaliese from a dreamless sleep. She remembered; she had forgotten to close the window before she and James had fallen asleep. She stretched, feeling the warm sheets slid against her legs. The room was dark; the sun had awhile to go before making its daily climb.

>
She lay in that darkness for a few minutes, to see if she could fall asleep again. She couldn't. Beside her, James' breath came in regular, even intervals. Annaliese kissed the tips of her fingers before lightly pressing them against his lips. Then, very carefully as not to wake her Watcher, she slid out of bed.

>
Annaliese dressed quickly and quietly. She slipped out the door to their room and made her way downstairs. The wood floors creaked beneath her; she froze. The last thing she wanted was to wake the older couple, the Steins, who ran the boarding house. She was extra careful as she opened and closed the front door on her way out.

>
Revello Drive was quiet at four o'clock in the morning. She wrapped her arms around her body; the air wasn't only damp, it was slightly chilly. Heading nowhere in particular, she made a right turn towards the center of town.

>
It wasn't until she heard the first snarl that she realized, in her haste to leave the house without waking anyone up, she had completely forgotten to take a stake with her.

>
"Damn", she whispered to herself. Then, a second snarl came from the darkness, entirely different than the first. When she heard the third distinct growl, she began to panic.

>
She addressed the creatures. "I know you're all there." Her voice shook. "Can we get this over with?"

>
Without warning, something hit her from behind. Annaliese landed on her knees; gravel scraped through her skirt to her skin. She scrambled to her feet in time to see her escape route being cut off. She was surrounded. Annaliese did a quick count. At least seven vampires were circled around her. With weapons, they would have been no problem. But without.... She closed her eyes and said a quick prayer.

>
Evidently, God was in a generous mood. Before she could even say "amen", she heard the beautiful sound of a fist connecting with a face. Her eyes flew open. A tall, dirty looking man dressed in ragged clothes had taken on three of the vampires. The other four stood still, shocked by the sudden change in circumstances. Annaliese looked around frantically. A pile of wooden boxes lay against a nearby brick building. She ran for them, punched a hole in one with her fist and tore off a jagged piece of wood siding.

>
The first vamp was easy...a simple plunge through the back. But when he fell into a pile of dust, the others took notice and charged her. Balancing on her left leg, Annaliese kicked her right as high as it would go. There was the satisfying crunch of cartilage as her foot slammed into a vamp's nose. Another grabbed her from behind, pinning her arms, as the fourth ran straight towards her. Annaliese thought quickly. Throwing all her weight against the vamp who held her arms, she lifted her feet off the ground and thrust them out. Using the vamp in front of her as a springboard, she kicked her way up his chest until she could completely flip her body around and out of the other vamp's grip. She landed behind him and with a quick stab to his back, dusted him. The last vampire ran for her, but before he could make it all the way, he screamed and crumbled into dust. The strange man appeared right behind him. Even in the poor light, Annaliese could see his face.

>
He was a vampire.

>
Instinctively, Annaliese raised her stake, but the man didn't make an attempt to attack her.

>
"You're the Slayer", he said simply.

>
Her eyes narrowed. "And you're a vampire. So, why are we chatting?"

>
The vampire's face relaxed back into its human state. He was handsome, it pained her to notice. "Don't worry. I can't...I mean, I won't..."

>
Annaliese lowered her hand, but remained in fighting stance. "Do I know you? You look very familiar...like I've seen you somewhere before."

>
"You fight well", he said quickly, avoiding her question. A long pause hung in the air between them. "I'll leave you alone." He made a motion to walk away.

>
"Wait!", Annaliese called out. The vampire turned back around. "You saved my life. And even though you are...what you are, the least I can do is introduce myself." She approached him warily and extended one hand. "I'm Annaliese."

>
Even more wary than she, the vampire briefly shook it. His skin was cold. "I'm A...nobody."

>
"A nobody?", Annaliese puzzled. "That's not very..."

>
He dropped her hand and backed away. "I..I have to..." He pointed to a spot down the street. After another pause, he walked away.

>
"For what it's worth...thank you", she said to his retreating figure. He didn't reply or turn back around.
>
Annaliese watched him disappear into the shadows. "Nobody's a nobody", she said to herself. "Especially not with a face like that."
The face of an angel.

>

>
February 14, 1948

>
"The rain's stopped!", Annaliese announced.

>
James glanced up from his book. "Ah, good...nothing like wet, *slippery*, muddy ground and cold, *damp* air for slaying."

>
Turning away from the window, she put her hands on her hips. "James...you worry way too much. I never have to worry; you do it for me." She winked.

>
He sighed and set the book aside. "Annie, can you blame me? I wish you'd let me take you to a doctor for this stomach bug."

>
"James, who's been living in this body for eighteen years?"

>
Reluctantly, "You have."

>
"And who knows when something's truly wrong with it?"

>
He shook his head, smiling. "All right, all right. I'm defeated again. Just promise me you'll be careful tonight."

>
Annaliese was already gathering weapons. "I'm always careful, James."

>

>
"I want to make one more sweep of the park before we call it a night", Annaliese said, two hours later.

>
James stuck his hands in his pockets and sighed. "As long as you're feeling all right, I suppose it couldn't hurt."

>
She kissed the tip of his nose and pulled a second stake from inside his suit coat. "Glad I have my Watcher's..." There was a huge noise not too far away, almost like an explosion. A burst of bright light accompanied it, illuminating the sky for a brief second. "Oh my God..." Annaliese took off running.

>
"Annie, be careful!", James cried.

>
When she reached the clearing that had, as best she could figure, been ground zero for the strange explosion, she stopped in her tracks. Two teenagers, a blond girl and a dark haired boy, lay facedown on the still-wet ground. She moved towards them, but a noise from the bushes across the way drew her attention. She thought she made out the figure of Zeitlos in the moonlight. Drawing her stake, she ran after it.

>
Annaliese crashed through the bushes for a few minutes in pursuit of the demon, but soon realized she was chasing nothing. She turned around and made her way back to the fallen teenagers.

>
In the short time she had been gone, both kids had woken up. They sat on the ground in a daze, as though they weren't quite sure where they were. But at least they looked unhurt.

>
"Thank goodness. You two are all right", she said aloud. Both teenagers turned their heads and stared at her uncomprehendingly. Neither responded. "You are all right, are you not?", she continued, kneeling on the ground to see them better.

>
The blond girl put a hand to her forehead. "Um...yeah. We're okay. A little wiggled out, but we'll survive. How long have you been there?"

>
Annaliese's brow furrowed. "You don't remember?" Inwardly, she sighed. If they had been unconscious, they probably wouldn't remember what caused the strange explosion.

>
The dark haired boy spoke up. "Should we?"

>
"Perhaps it's just as well", Annaliese mused. She brushed off the strange feeling that the boy was looking her over. "You probably wouldn't believe it anyways."

>
The girl gave a soft snort; it took Annaliese aback slightly. "I doubt that." She attempted standing up.

>
Annaliese took ahold of the girl's arm to help her. "You might want to rest for awhile. You had quite a hard hit to the head, from what I can tell."

>
"Thanks, I'm pretty sure I can handle it." She shook off Annaliese.

>
Annaliese opened her mouth to reply, but was stopped by James' sudden entrance. "Annie", he said, coming to a stop before them. "Did you...take care of the problem?"

>
"Yes", she replied. "I did." James made an obvious, questioning gesture to the two kids. "They got caught in the crossfire." Beside her, the blond girl helped her friend to his feet.

>
"Can I talk to you for a second, Annie?" James took ahold of her elbow and lead her a few feet away. "What's going on?", he asked her, once they were out of earshot.

>
Annaliese gave a little shrug. "They were laying on the ground, unconcious. They're not burned, they're not even really bruised. I suppose something just knocked them down."

>
James glanced back at the teenagers. The girl was staring at them, strangely. "I don't know, Annie. Something seems...off about them."

>
She smiled and looked to her right for a second. "Those certainly are some interesting pants the girl is wearing." Her gaze moved back to the strangers. They were now in deep, anxious conversation. "They're probably just local kids having a romantic night out, James."

>
He sighed. "I suppose. Still, it doesn't hurt to be cautious. At least until we find out for sure."

>
"Well....they look normal to me." Across the way, the blond girl squatted on the ground, looking utterly defeated. She wanted to go to her, but her companion called out to them just then.

>
"Hey there!", he addressed them. "We're having kind of a debate over here. I think it's Monday and she..." He pointed to his friend. "...she thinks it's Tuesday. Can you help us out?"

>
"Really smooth, Xander", Annaliese could hear the girl mutter.

>
Annaliese looked at James before stepping towards them. "It's neither. Today is Friday."

>
The boy named Xander nodded. "Ah yes.....and that would be what date again?"

>
"February 14th", she replied, concern growing. "Are you positive that you are all right?"

>
The girl stood up. "Actually, we're not. We want to know what happened. To us."

>
"I was out patrolling....um.....taking a walk", Annaliese corrected herself, too late. "There were some.." She struggled for the right word "...ruffians about and they most likely attacked you. I think I must have frightened them away."

>
"Oh, now I remember", she girl said. "Their faces were horrible. And they had fangs." Annaliese's eyes flew open and she looked over at James.

>
Xander continued. "Yeah, they did. And they tried to bite our necks."

>
"Are you sure?", Annaliese asked. So the explosion had been caused by a vampire and not Zeitlos.

>
The two teenagers nodded. "It was almost as if they were.....oh but that's silly", the girl stopped herself.

>
"Almost as if they were what?", James prompted.

>
Xander laughed outrageously. "Vampires."

>
Annaliese felt her mouth fall open. In her four years of slaying, she had yet to encounter anyone outside of the Council who knew anything about the other world. "Um....James..." She looked to him for help, unsure of how to handle this.

>
James approached the duo. "How do you know about....", he started before the blond girl cut him off

>
"Let's just say that we know a lot of things that most people don't know. For one, does the name Zeitlos ring a bell?"

>
If Annaliese's mouth could have fallen open any further, it would have. James looked at her, anxiously.

>
"Uh...Buffy?", Xander made a slashing motion across his throat. "Ix-nay on the Eitlos-Zay."

>
"You know about Zeitlos?", Annaliese asked, once she had recovered. "How? Are you demon-hunters?" She paused warily. "Or demons?"

>
The girl named Buffy held up one hand. "I can't tell you very much. But what I can tell you is that we are the good guys."

>
Xander nodded to emphasize his friend's point. "Yep. We don't drink blood, eat babies or virgins, or try to destroy the world."

>
Annaliese found herself laughing at his complete irreverance for the very things her world was built around. "Well, that's a relief." She turned to James. "I think we're done for the night. I don't see any sign of Zeitlos. Except for that group the other day, there aren't too many vamps in this town."

>
He nodded his agreement, but gave her a strange look. "Not like New York." They both smiled at what seemed to be a private joke.

>
Annaliese turned to Buffy and Xander. "I'm Annaliese Janson and this is my Wat....James Wellborn. What are your names?", she asked, before she realized that she already knew. To cover, she asked another, rapid question. "Do you live in Sunnydale?"

>
"Yes", Buffy replied. She paused. "Well, no. Not this Sunnydale, anyways." Annaliese's brow crinkled. "What I mean is, our town in...um...Kansas is called Sunnydale. It's kind of confusing. Oh, and I'm....Buffy and he's Xander."

>
"Where are you staying, Buffy? We might need to get in contact with you", James asked, adjusting his glasses uncomfortably. The teenagers didn't reply

>
"Why don't you stay with us?", Annaliese found herself offering. "That way we wouldn't have to search Sunnydale for you." *Plus,* she thought. *We can keep an eye on you.*

>
Buffy nodded. "Thanks. We'd appreciate that."

>
Annaliese nodded and linked her arm with James', out of habit. The sudden sense that something was unique about the girl overtook her. Something more than her pants that bordered on indecent. Annaliese looked up at the dark sky. Whoever the strangers turned out to be, at least the next few days would be anything but boring.

>

>
The fountain pen was as heavy as his heart; it rested against the paper, ready to write, but the hand that held it had no motivation to do so. A drop of salty moisture landed on the page. James Wellborn wiped the residual tear from his eye and cleared his throat.

>
He had a diary entry to make. His last as a Watcher.

>
February 16, 1948

>
He stared at the date for a long time. Could it really have been only been twenty-four hours since...? More tears threatened to well up. He valiantly blinked them back. What good would they do now? They certainly wouldn't do Annaliese any good. Or their baby.

>
The tears spilled over anyways. "Oh God", he whispered. He set the pen down in the diary's crease and buried his face in his hands. "Our baby....we would have had a baby."

>
Shaking his head violently, James jumped to his feet. He wanted to scream; he wanted to bring the walls of the house down with his anguish. He wanted to make everyone in the entire town of Sunnydale feel the way he felt. Ripped apart. And all alone.

>
His tall body slumped into an armchair, too exhausted to stand anymore. How had he gotten here? And why wasn't she here anymore? He could remember going to the park with the two strange kids, Buffy and Xander. He remembered Zeitlos showing up....and Annaliese taking him on.

>
"Oh God", he repeated, closing his eyes. The demon had caught her in his horns....there had been so much blood. The creature just tossed her to the ground. There hadn't even been time for her to scream. He was glad; that scream would have haunted him for the rest of his life.

>
After that point, his memories were faded. The next clear thing he remembered was waking up with his face pressed against the ground. Buffy and Xander were gone. Zeitlos was gone. And Annie.... He swallowed heavily.

>
He had found her laying exactly where she had landed; nothing had changed, except for the pool of blood around her body. But she had still been alive. Her pulse had been practically non-existent and her breathing was shallow, but she was still with him. What had he said to her? Annie, baby...stay with me. Please don't leave me. James blinked. Then, he had carefully picked her up and taken her to the hospital. He closed his eyes, remembering.

>

>
*"I need a doctor!!! Please.....my fiancée is badly hurt!" She was so still in his arms. Her blood covered him.

>
Two people in white coats took her from him. "What happened?", one doctor asked.

>
He had to think quickly. "A...um...wild dog attacked her in the park. Please help her!"

>
"We're going to do everything we can, young man. What's her name?"

>
"Annaliese."

>
"And you are....?"

>
"Her fiancée, James Wellborn. Just help her!! Please."

>
The doctor motioned to a nurse to follow him. "If you'll just wait in the lobby, Mr. Wellborn." The doctors took Annaliese through a set of swinging double doors. He sat down on a hard chair and ran his bloody fingers through his hair.

>
The minutes had passed like hours. He was aware of nothing that went on around him until a nurse approached him. "Sir? The doctors are ready to speak to you now."

>
He stood up and walked in the direction the nurse pointed. The doctor who had taken Annaliese stood in the stark white hallway, writing on a clipboard. The man looked up. "Mr. Wellborn?"

>
"Is Annie all right?" His voice was hoarse.

>
The doctor folded his arms around his clipboard. "Annaliese lost a great deal of blood, Mr. Wellborn."

>
"The dog....it attacked her."
>
"There were surface wounds, but she lost the most blood from the miscarriage."
>
James blinked rapidly. "The...the what...?"
>
The doctor cleared his throat, uncomfortably. "I gather you weren't aware that your...fiancee was pregnant."
>
"Oh God...no...no, I didn't know." He closed his eyes. The daily stomach bug that disappeared in the afternoon.... "But I should have...I should have known." He opened them again. "How's Annie? Will she be all right?"
>
"I'm sorry, Mr. Wellborn. We did everything we could. She simply lost too much blood...."
>
He stared at the doctor, unable to comprehend what the man was saying. "But...but you can replace blood. I know you can. Annie gave blood during the war...."
>
The doctor shook his head. "She lost it faster than we could replace it, Mr. Wellborn." James felt the man approach him and place on hand on his shoulder. "She's gone."
>
James had to force himself to keep breathing. In that instant, he realized....his world would never be the same again. She really was gone; he could feel it in every part of his body.
>
With her and their unborn child, went his spirit.*

>

>
A knock on the bedroom door ended his silent reverie. Reluctantly, he pulled himself up and answered it. Mr. and Mrs. Stein stood in the hallway, their faces somber. "Hello", he greeted them. His voice was flat.
>
"Oh Mr. Wellborn", Mrs. Stein enfolded him in an embrace. "We're so very sorry about your wife."
>
He half-heartedly patted her back. "I..um...appreciate that."

>
"This is the most horrible thing that has ever happened", Mrs. Stein went on. "She was such a lovely young woman. So full of life."

>
James' eyes clouded over. "Yes...yes she was."
>
Mr. Stein cleared his throat. "This arrived from the hospital." He held out a small package. A large, manila envelope. A smaller envelope sat on top of it. "And a boy from the photograph shop brought this by."

>
"Thank you." James took them. There was a moment of silence. "Mrs. Stein, I'll be leaving the day after tomorrow so if you could..."

>
"It's no problem, Mr. Wellborn", she assured him. She looked up at her husband. "We'll leave you alone now." James nodded as the older couple moved down the hall.

>
He walked back into the room and closed the door behind him. He ripped open the smaller envelope and pulled out the small but thick stack of photographs. The top picture made him stop in his tracks. Annaliese's face.....it wasn't looking at the camera, but off to the right. She was smiling; her hair caught the light and shone, even in black and white. Unable to look at it anymore, James set the pictures aside.

>
With leadened fingers, he opened the envelope from the hospital and pulled out its contents. A death certificate. Annaliese's earrings, the small silver studs her father had given her on her twelfth birthday. Thankfully, the hospital had thought to discard her bloody, torn clothes. And that was it; a piece of paper and some jewelry. His brow furrowed and he reached his hand into the deepest corners of the envelope.

>
"Where is her necklace?", he asked himself. As much as he felt around the bottom of the envelope, his fingers found nothing. The silver snowflake was gone.

>
For the first time since the doctor had told him the news, James broke down. His knees gave out from under him and he held onto the bedpost to keep from falling. Sobs wrenched his body.

>
"Annie!", he cried, not caring who heard him. "Annie, come back to me!!"

>
When he had regained composure, he sat on the floor for a long time, just staring off into space. His mind was numb; no thought formed. It could have stayed that way forever...he didn't care. He absentmindedly stood up and turned on the radio, just for background noise. An elderly woman's voice droned on about women in the workplace; he sat back down against the bed. He wasn't consciously aware of his eyes closing and his body lowering to the floor, but soon he was fast asleep.

>

>
*She appeared to him in the outfit he had first seen her wearing outside the movie theatre in Geneva. Her hair bounced in carefully underturned curls, held back from her face on either side. A blue cotton sweater clung to the curves of her chest and her legs were bare from the knee down to the white and black of her childish saddle shoes. She smiled at him with the rosy lips he had often kissed for hours just because he could.

>
"Annie", he heard himself whisper. "Am I dreaming?"

>
"Of course you are. But that doesn't make me any less real." She approached him and held out her hand. He hesitantly touched her fingers with his; they were solid, but not in an entirely human way. "See?"

>
He lowered his hand. "Is this heaven?"

>
She shrugged. "I haven't quite figured it all out yet. But by the time you get here, I will have." Her brow crinkled.

"James....you're crying. Why are you crying?."

>
"You're dead, Annie. And....I'm all alone."

>
"No", she reached out and placed her palm against his cheek, wiping under his eye with her thumb. "You'll never really be alone, James. I'll always be with you....just in a different way now."

>
He covered her hand with his. "They've lost your necklace, Annie. It wasn't with your things." He lowered his eyes. "Not that there were a lot of things..."

>
She smiled. "It's not lost, James. I gave it to someone for safe-keeping. I know now who she is and believe me....in her world, she's going to need it very soon."

>
"I need it, Annie. To remember you."

>
"James William Wellborn." She pulled her hand away and put them on her hips. "If the only memories you have of me are centered around a necklace...I'll never appear to you in a dream again!"

>
Despite himself, he laughed. "I'm sorry, Annie. My head....it's very confused right now."

>
"I know, my love." She stepped even closer to him. "I'll bet that right now you're wishing the necklace *was* the only memory you have of me."

>
He nodded. "You're everywhere, Annie. Everything reminds me of you. I saw a butterfly on my way back from the hospital....and I wanted to point it out to you. But you weren't there beside me." He swallowed. "Everything reminds me of you."

>
She put her hand over his heart. "That's how you'll never be

alone. That's how I'll always be near." She stepped back. "But my life is over, James. Yours isn't. Don't remember me so much that you forget that."

>
"I'll try, Annie. I promise." He moved towards her. "Am I allowed to kiss you?"

>
"No." There was a pause. "But I can kiss you." She smiled and reached out, cupping his face with her hands. The feel of her lips against his was just like touching her hand: solid but not entirely so. "When you wake up", she whispered. "You'll be alone. But remember..."

>
"You'll be there", he finished. "I won't ever forget that." Her face began to fade before his very eyes. "Annie....I love you!", he cried. But she was gone.*

>

>
His eyes popped open; the woven pattern of Mrs. Stein's rug stared back at him. He sat up. It was dark outside; he wondered just how long he had been asleep. Fragments of a dream clung to his memory, hazy and uncertain. The specifics of the dream had been lost to the recesses of his mind. All that remained was an unexplained feeling of closure. Something he had been quite certain he would never have.

>
With shaky legs, he stood. The radio wailed Count Basie's One O'clock Jump. He was tempted to turn it off, unable to recall why he had even turned it on in the first place, but at the last second, left it playing. Silence was not something he needed to surround himself in.

>
The diary lay on the tiny desk, still opened to the same page, blank except for the date. He walked to it, sat down and picked up his pen. After a long moment, he began to write.

>
"Annaliese died last night trying to stop the demon", James quietly spoke as he wrote. "He got away, yet the world woke up this morning." He paused.

>
There's no wall, physical or emotional, that can separate us anymore. I promise. You'll never wake up alone again.

>
With a deep breath, he continued his work. "Only it woke up with a new Slayer."

>
*I know how much you've missed your home, Annie.

>
It's gotten better. I'm a lot stronger than I look, James. You know that.*

>
"I'll be taking her back to Chicago to be buried." Sighing, he set down his pen.

>
*You always have to know what's next.

>
I'm inquisitive. That's why you love me.*

>
"But I don't know what's next", he said to the empty room. "I have no idea what to do next."

>
Heaven....I'm in heaven...and my heart beats so that I can hardly speak...

>
James swung his head around and stared at the radio. Frank Sinatra sang on, unaware of the significance of his song.

>
....and I seem to find the happiness I seek...when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek.....

>
"Annie", he whispered. Suddenly, the dream came back to him, as clearly as though it had really happened. He smiled as one who has just had a weight lifted off their shoulders. "Annie....I know you're here. Thank you." His eyes closed briefly. "Thank for you reminding me."

>
James reached for the packet of photographs he had set aside earlier. Gently, he lifted the top picture, turned it over, scribbled the date on the back and placed it between the pages of the final

entry. With one hand, he snapped the diary shut and brought the leather up to his lips briefly. It was time to pass it on to a new Watcher. To a new Slayer.

>
They were what was next.

>
The End

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